

EPISCOPAL DIVINITY SCHOOL

Thesis/Project

**FROM CONTENTION TO TRANSFORMATION:
A LITURGICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND DIALOGICAL JOURNEY TO
HOLY AND COMMON GROUND**

BY

PRISCILLA BATES-MAKARIAS

M. Div., Harvard Divinity School, 1997

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the

Requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

2001



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PRISCILLA BATES-MAKARIAS
2000-2001

Approved by

Supervisor The Rev. Dr. Sheryl Kizorek, Ed.D. Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology
Name and Degree
Position Title

First Reader The Rev. Dr. Sheryl Kizorek, Ed.D. Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology
Name and Degree
Position Title

Second Reader The Rev. Richard D. McCall, Ph.D.
Asst. Prof. of Liturgics and Church Music
Name and Degree
Position Title

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A Doctor of Ministry thesis at the Episcopal Divinity School is designed to allow the student an opportunity to process and integrate spiritual, ministerial and academic experiences into a corpus that will inform and enhance the future trajectories of one's ministry in the Church and the world. For this author, the process began with a conversion experience at the altar rail of the Church of St. Luke's and St. Margaret's, Allston MA, in the summer of 1989. I am grateful to the Rev'd Mary D. Glasspool, then rector, for her prayers and guidance, as well as for requiring me to read the works of liturgical theologians Dom Gregory Dix and Leonel Mitchell as part of my Christian initiation! I am profoundly grateful to the Rev'd Deborah (Dee) M. Woodward, who further guided my spiritual and ministerial journey while I was a seminarian at, and later member of, Christ Church, Somerville MA. Dee has given me unflagging support and encouragement along every step of my ministerial and academic journey. I am blessed to have her as mentor, friend, and colleague.

The seeds of this project were sown during the writing of my Master of Divinity thesis at Harvard Divinity School. I am grateful for the support and invaluable insights of Dr. Lawrence Wills, my thesis advisor, and the Rev'd Dr. Suzanne Hiatt, then professor of pastoral theology at EDS, who was my second reader. Larry now teaches at EDS and has continued to lend his encouragement to me in his usual gentle and thoughtful manner.

I am constantly and unceasingly grateful to all of the students, staff, and faculty at EDS who have walked this journey with me. I am especially thankful for my advisors,

the Rev'd Dr. Sheryl A. Kujawa and the Rev'd Dr. Richard McCall, whose unfailing support, guidance, and humor made this process intellectually challenging and fun! Too many stories and too little space prevent me from saying more than many, many thanks to Sheryl and Rick for all that they have done for me and this project. I am also thankful for the support and guidance of Dr. Gale Yee, Director of the FLT, who directed the initial thesis proposal. Special thanks to Gene Fox, circulation librarian at The Library, for assigning me a carrel with a view and for helping me keep track of the volumes of books that I borrowed and tried to return on time. To all of my fellow classmates, too numerous to name, I offer thanks for hearing me out, asking me questions, and praying me through this process. I am especially thankful for the prayers, friendship, and encouragement offered by my Compline companions Harrison Heidel, Jay Lawlor, Ann Rose, Micki Shirey, and Cheryl Simcoe and her partner, Taylor Cushman.

This endeavor would *never* have been possible without the love and support of my spouse, Ann Makarias. I have no words to express my love and thanks for her presence in my life. Sweetie, the diningroom table is now clear of my piles of books, files, computer peripherals and other paraphernalia!

Introduction

When I pick up the *Book of Common Prayer* I see my Christian self on every page of worship and prayer. I see my Christian self celebrated in the liturgies for the proclamation of the Word of God and in the Holy Eucharist, in the Prayers and Thanksgivings, and I especially see my Christian self in the Baptismal Covenant. In these pages my woman self is also celebrated and lifted up more often than not – at least in principle, if not the letter. But I am more than a Christian woman. I am a Christian woman who is a lesbian, called by God into a committed, life-long monogamous relationship with Ann, my partner of over eleven years. As Christian women who are lesbians we recognize ourselves more often than not on the pages of the *BCP*. This recognition stops short in the middle of the Pastoral Offices. Yes, we are confirmed and have committed ourselves to Christian Service; we have received the rite of Reconciliation, ministered to the sick, and participated ministration at the time of death with friends and loved ones; one day our bodies will be received into our parish home and our lives will be celebrated in the Burial of the Dead. But because we are lesbians, the sacrament and blessing of marriage is denied to us in both the ecclesial and secular worlds. We do not see ourselves or our gay brothers and lesbian sisters in Christ in the marriage rite which calls the people to witness and bless the joining together of two people in Holy Matrimony.

In addition to being canonically denied the sacrament of marriage, lesbian and gay Episcopalians are by extension denied the sacraments of Holy Orders. These denials

have been affirmed by every General Convention since 1979 and by the Anglican Communion at the Lambeth Conference in 1998. I marvel at the faith and patience of those lesbian and gay people and their supporters who have waited a quarter of a century for the ‘mind of the Church’ to be opened to allowing all baptized Christians equal access to all the sacraments. I have been an Episcopalian for only half of that time; God knows that my patience has been tried and tested; and I thank God for the faith that I share with many of my Christian sisters and brothers that one day we all will be able to see ourselves on every page of the *Book of Common Prayer*.

In the conclusion of my M. Div thesis, *There Shall be no Outcasts: A Comparative Analysis of Episcopal Church Attitudes toward Sexual Minorities* (Harvard Divinity School 1994), I argued that General Convention 1979 Resolution A-53s – which affirmed the “traditional teaching of the Church on marriage, marital fidelity, and sexual chastity as the standard of Christian sexual morality” and recommended that it was “not appropriate to ordain a practicing homosexual, or any other person who is engaged in heterosexual relations outside of marriage” – was the greatest obstacle to the ordination of lesbian and gay people. I wrote:

In affirming the traditional teaching of the Church on marriage, marital fidelity, and sexual chastity, and in decreeing that it is inappropriate for ordinands —both hetero- and homosexual – to engage in sexual relations outside of Christian marriage, the Church has placed a barrier against any openly lesbian and gay people in committed, life-long, monogamous relationships from seeking ordination. Further, the resolution effectively requires *chastity* for heterosexual ordinands – until, in theory, they are married. Gay and lesbian ordinands are effectively required to lead *celibate* lives if they wish to be ordained, since the Church does not recognize same-sex unions.

Given these reasons, I must conclude that gay and lesbian ordination will not be canonically recognized until such time that the Episcopal Church recognizes same-sex unions. Same-sex unions will not be canonically recognized until the Church is able to develop both a theology of sexuality that recognizes gay and lesbian sexuality *and* a theology of marriage/covenant that embraces homo- and heterosexual unions. . . such a theology will be difficult to establish because it will require the Church to assess the meaning, depth, and breadth of Christian Marriage. . . such an assessment will prove to be as difficult and divisive as the current conversations about human sexuality and gay and lesbian ordination because the institution of Christian Marriage – legally and sacramentally – secularly and religiously sacrosanct. . . In the midst of present and future discussions, we all must remember the vows of our Baptismal Covenant and promise to seek and serve Christ in all persons, to love our neighbors as ourselves, to strive for justice and peace, and to respect the dignity of every human being. We will, with God’s help. Amen.(pp.43-44)

The impetus of these conclusions was two-fold: First, I wanted to see the Church enter into a theological reassessment of the theology of Christian Marriage and to develop a theology of sexuality that was inclusive of both homo- and heterosexual people. Second, I believed that any such future conversations had to be set firmly within the context our Baptismal Covenant – believing then, as now, that this sacrament provided the only common ground shared by all Episcopalians, regardless of their sexual orientation, the foundation upon which people of differing views could come together.

Six triennia have passed since Resolution A-53s was adopted as a recommendation to the dioceses that compose the General Convention of the Episcopal Church. While some dioceses in the Church have chosen to ordain openly lesbian and gay individuals, the vast majority of episcopal jurisdictions do not, and the national church is no closer to canonical recognition of the validity of the ordination of openly gay and lesbian people who are in committed, life-long, monogamous relationships.

Two triennia have passed since the submission of my thesis and – to the best of my knowledge – no one in the national church has taken on the daunting task of reassessing the Church’s theology of Christian Marriage nor attempted to develop a theology of sexuality. I believe that the time has come for such a project. To that end, I humbly submit the following proposal.

I believe with all my heart, soul, and mind that the full inclusion of lesbian and gay people in all of the sacraments of the Episcopal Church must begin with a reassessment of the theology of Christian Marriage. Such a reassessment must be undergirded by a theology of sexuality and sexual ethics that calls each of us – regardless of sexual orientation – into wholeness and integrity. How can the Church begin such a task? Where can we begin such an assessment?

I. Description

A. This thesis/project will explore and explicate the ways in which the critical engagement of scripture within the context of the liturgies of the **Book of Common Prayer** can inform and transform theology in times of critical discourse.

B. I believe that the worship services of the **Book of Common Prayer** can provide a vehicle through which the Episcopal Church can engage any of the pernicious and contentious issues and concerns affecting the Church today. We Episcopalians are people of the **Book of Common Prayer**. We ‘do’ theology in the context of our worship. We are informed and transformed through our actions and interactions within our liturgies, through the Word and sacraments.

In order to test my theory that the **Book of Common Prayer** can be a vehicle through which the Church can engage any difficult and contentious issue, my thesis will focus on the development of a dialogue through liturgy that could lead the Church to a theology of Christian Marriage that is inclusive of both heterosexual and homosexual persons. I will focus on five key areas: 1) A discussion of the Anglican tradition of engaging change and conflict. 2) An exploration of the ways in which liturgical theology informs our ecclesiology and our theology. 3) A reflection on the ways in which the lectionary can be used to transform the Church. 4) A brief history of Christian Marriage. And 5) A detailed discussion of how the Episcopal Church has engaged in conversations about homosexuality and same-sex unions.

It is my hope to bring this project to the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States for affirmation and recommendation for use in the Church in 2003.

II. Methodology

Given the controversial nature of the debate around homosexuality in the Church today, I believe that it is safe to assume that any attempt to develop a theological justification for the inclusion of homosexual people into our understanding of Christian Marriage will be both difficult and contentious. I believe that if we engage the relevant biblical passages about love, marriage, covenant and relationship in the context of our worship together, we are theologically better prepared to both talk about what they mean in our personal lives and to be open to the possibility of transformation.

Chapter 1

In the first chapter, I explore and discuss those elements of our Anglican history and tradition that best illustrate the ways in which we have historically engaged difficult issues and concerns. Particular attention is given to prayer book revision and the liturgical movement in North America. The purpose of this chapter is show that we have a long history of engagement with contentious and divisive issues that have threatened the very fabric of our Communion, yet have found creative ways to find common ground.

A. Introduction

B. Voices in the Wilderness

C. The Anglican Tradition

D. The Liturgical Movement in North America

Chapter 2

Chapter two discusses models and theories of liturgical theology and how praying shapes believing. I also explore some of the ways in which we can liberate liturgical theology and open up the possibilities of embracing dialogue through liturgy.

A. Models of Liturgical Theology

B. Theories of Liturgical Theology

C. Liberating Liturgical Theology: A Feminist Perspective

D. Dialogue Through Liturgy

Chapter 3

In chapter three, I discuss the ways in which lectionaries and sermons can be used to engage difficult and contentious issues. I will also provide a topical lectionary of

passages commonly used in conversations about homosexuality and same-sex unions, but do not appear in either the *Book of Common Prayer* or the *Revised Common Lectionary*.

- A. Liturgy of the Word**
- B. Sermons**
- C. Alternative Lectionary**
- D. Some Synthesis of Liturgy and Dialogue**

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 provides a brief history of marriage in general and Christian marriage in particular. The purpose of this chapter is to show the ways in which marriage has been perceived and changed over the centuries.

- A. Marriage in Hebrew Scripture**
- B. Marriage in the New Testament**
- C. Marriage in the Patristic Period**
- D. Marriage in the Medieval Period**
- E. Marriage in the Reformation**
- F. Marriage in the Modern Period**
- G. Marriage in the Episcopal Church**

Chapter 5

In this chapter, I provide a detailed history of how the Episcopal Church has engaged in conversations around homosexuality and same-sex unions. Like the previous chapter, this section offers an historical context for the scope the Church's engagement of contemporary issues.

A. Introduction

B. Seeds of Controversy: Homosexuality

C. Prophecy, Expediency, or Showdown? Same-Sex Unions

D. Conclusion

Conclusion

Appendices

III. Definitions

A. Christian Marriage/Holy Matrimony

1. **Holy matrimony** is a physical and spiritual union between a man and a woman, entered into within the community of faith, by mutual consent of heart, mind, will, and with the intent that it will be lifelong. (*Constitution and Canons For the Government of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America Known as the Episcopal Church*, Canon 18, Section 2, p. 54. Hereafter to be referred to as *C & C*)

2. **Marriage:** the social institution under which a man and a woman establish their decision to live as husband and wife by legal commitments, religious ceremonies, etc. (*Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*; (hereafter to be referred to as *RHWUD*)).

3. **Matrimony:** the state of being married; marriage; the rite, ceremony, or sacrament of marriage. (*RHWUD*).

4. **Christian Marriage:** term used by the Episcopal Church to describe the institution of Holy Matrimony.

B. Marriage Canons

1. The legal and canonical requirements of the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church which define, regulate, and proscribe the solemnization of Holy Matrimony between a man and a woman.

C. Homosexuality: sexual desire or behavior directed toward a person or persons of one's own sex. (*RHWUD*).

1. **Lesbian:** of, pertaining to, or characteristic of female homosexuality; a female homosexual. (*RHWUD*).

2. **Gay:** a homosexual person, especially a male. (*RHWUD*).

D. Heterosexuality: sexual feeling or behavior directed toward a person or persons of the opposite sex. (*RHWUD*).

E. Homophobia: unreasoning fear of or antipathy toward homosexuals and homosexuality. (*RHWUD*).

F. Heterosexism: a prejudiced attitude or discriminatory practices against homosexuals by heterosexuals. (*RHWUD*).

G. Book of Common Prayer

The *Book of Common Prayer* is the liturgical book sanctioned by General Convention for use in the worship services of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America.

1. **Morning Prayer:** an office of the **BCP** intended for public and private devotions in the morning.
2. **Holy Eucharist:** also called Holy Communion, is the primary service for Sunday worship. It is at the Eucharist that Christians give thanks in the sharing of bread and wine; the sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood.
3. **Noon Prayer:** an office of the **BCP** intended for public and private devotions in the afternoon.
4. **Evening Prayer:** an office of the **BCP** intended for public and private use in the evening.

H. General Convention

The official legislative body of the Episcopal Church which meets every three years. General Convention is composed of the House of Bishops and the House of

Deputies. This latter body is composed of clerical and lay representatives elected by each diocese of the Episcopal Church.

IV. Limitations

This proposal will discuss only homosexuals and heterosexuals. The complexities of the issues around bisexuality and Transgendered-ness are beyond the scope of this analysis.

While I believe that the general concept of theological conversation within the context of one's worship life can be applied to the various liturgical styles of the many denominations of the Christian Church, the scope of this analysis will be limited to the Episcopal Church.

Within the context of this paper, these terms -- lesbian, and gay -- will be used to describe the predominant and primary psychological, emotional, and sexual orientation of women and men who are in, or seek to be in, monogamous, life-long, loving, and covenanted relationships with a member of the same sex. While it is the case that there are lesbian and gay persons who eschew monogamy and any kind of covenanted relationships, the scope of this analysis does not allow for the consideration of individuals in this category.

V. Accountabilities

Advisors: Sheryl Kujawa, Rick McCall

Context of Ministry: Although my active, professional ministries have been primarily with homeless, poor, and elderly people, my personal and pastoral ministries have been intimately wrapped up in issues of homosexuality and the Church. In both cases, I have strived to live out my calling to minister to those who are on the margins of society. This project is intended to help the Church find common and holy ground where there are neither boundaries nor forces that exclude or marginalize any member of the Body of Christ.

I am accountable to my Creator, God

I am accountable to my Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

I am accountable to my Sustainer, the Holy Spirit.

Congregational Studies/Feminist Liberation Theology: The content and purpose of this project is directed toward congregational usage, hence Congregational Studies is the appropriate program. The liberative and transformational nature of this proposal is informed by many of the hermeneutical principles of feminist biblical interpretation, hence, Feminist Liberation Theology is an appropriate program. I will endeavor to be accountable to both of these programs.

Anti-racism/Multi-culturalism: In keeping with the mission of the Episcopal Divinity School, I hold myself accountable to God's transforming mission which calls us to be an anti-racist and multicultural community. I believe that the liturgical, theological, and dialogical process of my thesis/project can allow the Church to confront all of its "-isms" and be transformed.

The Cambridge Accord: I hold myself accountable to the principles of the Cambridge Accord and call on all bishops, priests, deacons, and lay people of the Anglican Communion, as well as all people of good conscience of every nation and religious creed, to share in this accountability.

CHAPTER I

A. Introduction

Some thoughts about where the Episcopal Church has been

From Revolutionary War to Cold War, from civil rights to equal rights, from the Oxford Movement to the Women's Movement, from ancient rites to modern rites, the tides of political, social, liturgical, and religious transformations have wrought many sea-changes in the Episcopal Church during the past two centuries. Prayer Book revision, the ordination of women, and the rights of homosexuals have stormed through the Church during the last two decades, forever changing the long-familiar landscape of generations of Episcopalians. We have just embarked upon both a new century and a new millennium. Old storms, once thought to have been swept out to sea, are reforming and winds of change are moving once again across the land. Many in the Church will take refuge in the safe harbors of the past; others will attempt to ride out the storms in homemade arks of scripture, reason, and tradition; some will ignore the warnings. Whatever means we use to survive the theological storms, we must both assess how the Church has weathered these and other contentious issues, and we must look for new ways to tame the elements that continue to erode the foundations of the Church that we love. We must search out holy and common ground upon which the entire Church can continue

to do the work that God has given us to do. This is work that needs be done by everyone in the Church. How can we do this work?

I believe that the worship services of the *Book of Common Prayer* can provide a vehicle through which the Episcopal Church can engage any difficult and contentious issue through the critical engagement of scripture. We Episcopalians are people of the Prayer Book. We ‘do’ theology in the context of our worship. We are informed and transformed through the Word and sacraments. *Lex orandi legem statuat credendi*: ‘the law of prayer establishes the law of faith.’ Praying shapes believing.¹ The *BCP* is more than a collection of rites. It is a living expression of that juncture between what we believe and what we pray. It is where we find common ground for the expression of our faith. Louis Weil emphasizes this point when he writes

Although the Nicene Creed is a statement of faith issued by a general council of the Church and thus accepted as authoritative for Anglicanism, its significance as a doctrinal foundation among Anglicans is probably far more the result of liturgical use than of preoccupation with the authority of the Council. This is but one example of the way in which corporate prayer has shaped belief through the impact of the *Book of Common Prayer*, not only in shaping Anglican piety, but theology as well.²

The distinctive nature of the relationship between prayer, liturgy, and theology seems to have been overlooked in the recent history of the Episcopal Church. The institution has chosen to focus on engaging theologically significant issues outside of its worship life,

¹ See Leonel L. Mitchell, *Praying Shapes Believing: A theological commentary on the Book of Common Prayer*, (New York 1985).

² See Louis Weil, “The Gospel in Anglicanism,” pp. 67-68, in Stephen Sykes, John Booty, Jonathan Knight, eds., *The Study of Anglicanism*, Revised Edition, (London, Minneapolis 1998).

i.e., in workshops, conferences, focus groups, retreats, and bible studies, rather than grappling with issues where it does theology best – in the context of worship.

Why have we not grappled with such issues as human sexuality or racism within the context of our liturgy? Why have we not heard the scriptural passages most commonly cited to in these discussions about these issues in the Liturgy of the Word? While it may be the case that controversial issues have been addressed from time to time in sermons and homilies, the Lectionary does not offer many, if any, passages pertinent to such contentious and difficult issues as human sexuality or racism. How, then, can the people of God be expected to have the theological tools and information necessary to make decisions about these issues in the life of the Church?

The purpose of this chapter is to begin to explore the ways in which the critical engagement of scripture within the context of the *Book of Common Prayer* can inform and transform theology in the Church in these times of significant sea-changes.

B. Voices in the Wilderness

Countryman, Thompsett, Dozier

Can it be argued that the Church would be better able to weather the storms of controversy if the laity and the clergy were better informed about the issues? If the answer to this question is ‘yes,’ then it stands to reason that the Church must find more effective ways of disseminating information and providing the necessary tools with which congregations and their clergy can prepare themselves. Both lay and ordained need to have equal and independent access to such information. How should we do this in a Church that presumes that educated clergy will pass down information to the less well-informed laity?

L. William Countryman, Frederica Harris Thompsett, and Verna Dozier have each offered critiques of this model. Countryman, in *Living on the Border of the Holy: Renewing the Priesthood of All*,³ offers the following assessment of the disparities in the degrees of theological knowledge between the ordained and laity:

The churches spend a significant portion of their resources on candidates for ordination, which results in the clergy being theologically more educated, as a class, than the laity. . . . Indeed, one of the worse mistakes churches can make (and have at times made) is to restrict theological education to the clergy, thus making informed reflection about faith and life a clerical monopoly and encouraging clericalism among laity and clergy alike. (pp. 89-90)

This is a mistake because the clergy, as a class, tend to have a very limited view of what it means to be Christian. . . Clergy members. . . tend to narrow the scope of Christian faith until it becomes meaningful only within a highly ecclesiastical culture, and loses its involvement in everyday life. (p. 90)

As a result, the laity, cut off from real theological dialogue with the clergy and suspicious of dogma that claims to be beyond their questioning, often have to start theologizing from scratch, without benefit of the rich Christian tradition that clergy have kept to themselves. (p. 90)

Much of the mediocre and unreflective theology characteristic of popular American religion, alternating as it does between stony rigidity and spineless sentimentality, may be traced to just this origin: a clergy defined as belonging to a higher educational order. . . and a laity cut off from tradition except as bits and pieces of it might be doled out by the clergy for their own purposes. Repeatedly, the laity have turned to sources that were readily available – primarily translations of the Bible and the platitudes of popular piety. The result has been the construction of new, makeshift, and often clumsy theologies in place of the classical Christian traditions. The ‘new’ theology, in such a situation, then sometimes becomes tradition in its own right, albeit an impoverished one, as in American fundamentalism. (pp. 90-91)

Countryman’s critique touches upon a primary issue and concern of this thesis project: where do we ‘do’ theology? How do we, as Episcopalians, go about engaging theology? For most of us, Sunday in and Sunday out is when we hear the Word of God and listen to a sermon. We can accept, reject, synthesize and appropriate what we will from this process. We may pick up on some of these themes again during the parish bible study, in coffee hour conversations, or upon further reflection during the following week. For most parishioners, there is only one theological perspective: that of their parish priest.

³ L. William Countryman, *Living on the Border of the Holy: Renewing the Priesthood of All*, (Harrisburg 1999).

Thompsett, in *We Are Theologians*⁴ and *Living with History*⁵, offers the following critiques:

I am worried that the church will become a clerical reservation, a preserve that can only be fully understood and embodied by clergy. If we wish to embrace the image and reality of an engaged, expansive church, then our theology of the church both depends upon, and must be convincing to, lay people. Despite rhetorical flourishes about valuing and enabling 'lay ministry' (a redundant and awkward phrase), practical, effective definitions of the church as all the people of God, 99% of whom are laity, are beginning to disappear. (*WAT* pp. 2-3)

I am disturbed by the overall implications of shallow standards for biblical education in a congregation. If clergy and a few other leaders are the only ones regularly reading or studying the Bible, then a parish's listening skills and identity as a people in mission are limited. When a congregation does not reflect biblically on the everyday lives of its parishioners, then its collective wisdom is impoverished. (*WAT* p. 22)

In the early 1950s, the decade that some have called the Golden Age of the Episcopal Church, I do not remember being taught that each of us had a ministry. Nor can I recall 'laity' being affirmed as 'ministers' in the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*, the prayer book of my youth. In fact, I do not remember the terminology about 'ministry' shifting significantly in vernacular use until the early 1970s. By then the national Episcopal Church had begun to sponsor workshops on 'lay ministry.' Such workshops pointed to the startling claim in the proposed new prayer book that "the ministers of the Church are *lay persons*, bishops, priests, and deacons" (BCP 855). The catechism further asserts that the church carries out its mission "through the ministry of all its members" (BCP 855). At first, a number of persons found this naming of laity as 'ministers' off-putting. For some it was confusing, for others "too assertive," and yet for others it smacked of clericalization, of trying to make lay persons into unpaid clergy. (*LWH* pp. 58-59)

⁴ Fredrica Harris Thompsett, *We Are Theologians: Strengthening the People of the Episcopal Church*, (Cambridge 1989). Hereafter referred to as *WAT*.

⁵ Fredrica Harris Thompsett, *Living With History*, (Cambridge 1999). Hereafter referred to as *LWH*. It should be noted that Thompsett's concerns about clericalism had no grounds to change during the ten years between the publication of each book.

Today challenging questions still remain about the term ‘lay ministry’ and its eventual effectiveness. Will ‘ministry’ come to be acknowledged as extending into the world in theory and in practice? In practice, will ‘ministers’ be seen as ordinary Christians living out their faith in society at large? Will theological and rhetorical consensus among professional theologians and ordained leaders about encouraging laity to exercise their vocations be accepted and enfolded from the ground up? (*LWH* p. 59)

Where Countryman is rhetorical throughout his critique, Thompsett offers historical and practical assessment and some thoughts about ways to work with controversy.

Dozier takes a different tack. In *The Dream of God: A Call to Return*,⁶ she notes that the church made a flawed decision two thousand years ago when the apostles taught

It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. (Acts 6:2-4)

Dozier writes:

The seeds were sown for the exaltation of preaching and praying over cooking and serving – and this from men whose feet had been washed by the Lord! The decision was a serious flaw that marred the development of the church as it evolved more and more into an institution down through the ages, becoming less and less the people of God. The *laos*, the people of God, was divided into two groups, the clergy and the laity – the learned and the ignorant, the holy and the hangers-on, the controlling and the controlled. Such was the post-biblical church, such was the church of the Middle Ages, and so has continued to this day. (*TDG* p.141)

But the sleeping giant is stirring. Clergy and laity are beginning to realize that the kingdom of God will never be the reality God dreamed as long as

⁶ Verna Dozier, *The Dream of God: A Call to Return*, (Cambridge 1991). Hereafter referred to as *TDG*.

part of the *laos* struggles to maintain an institution, while the other part drops by on holy days to participate in an archaic ritual that has no effect on the lives they are leading the rest of the time. (*TDG* pp. 141-142)

The urgent task for us in the closing years of this turbulent century is to reclaim our identity as the people of God and live into our high calling as the baptized community. We are a chosen people, chosen for God's high purposes, that the dream of God for a new creation may be realized. God has paid us the high compliment of calling us to be coworkers with our Creator, a compliment so awesome that we have fled from it and taken refuge in the church. God does not need such an institution. "*Destroy this temple,*" Jesus said, "*and I will rebuild it in three days.*" The institution is replaceable. The living body of God's people is not. (*TDG* p. 145)

Dozier cuts right to the heart of the matter. She critiques the institutional church while affirming that it must exist - through the ministry of the clergy - to serve the laity and the world.

These are three voices that must be heard by the Church, but few people, including the clergy, have the time or the inclination to delve into these and other important authors. And given the need to disseminate important information about controversial issues facing the Church today, how do we educate and empower the laity and the clergy to engage the needs of the Church?

I believe the answer is familiar: through the liturgies of the *Book of Common Prayer*.

C. The Anglican Tradition

Where Countryman offers a rather intellectual critique of the theological and ecclesiological state of affairs, Thompsett and Dozier offer practical and doable suggestions for ways to begin to address the kinds of impasses facing the Church today. Before we examine their guidelines, we must first address some liturgical and theological concerns.

Anglican theological tradition past and present

Theology and history are intimately related and one cannot discuss Anglican theology without discussing Anglican history. This can be a particularly illuminating and fruitful endeavor when tracking the winds of change in the Church and has been ably illustrated by Fredrica Harris Thompsett in *Living With History*. Of particular interest is her discussion of three controversial chapters in church history, covering periods from the English Church of the sixteenth century, the American Church in the mid-nineteenth century, and the late Victorian era in Anglican/Episcopal Church. Thompsett focuses on these three episodes as illustrative of the kinds of forces that have shaped the institutional history of the Church and whose effects are still felt today. Each story shows how the Church has approached conflict and controversy, the first through resolution and compromise, the second through ignoring controversy for the sake of unity, and the third by welcoming change through drawing upon traditional theological resources. In this

section I want to revisit Thompsett's discussion of these three episodes before presenting three contemporary examples of how resolution and compromise, the ignoring of controversy for the sake of unity, and welcoming change through reliance on traditional Anglican theological resources have shaped the Episcopal Church in the late twentieth century.

*The Elizabethan Settlement: Resolution through Compromise*⁷

The Elizabethan Settlement established guidelines for the worship, governance, and theological character of the English Church 'that would balance tradition and the need for reform, and Catholic sacramental structure with Protestant theological understandings' during one of history's greatest periods of religious instability, the Reformation. The astute and adroit Elizabeth I and her chief ministers forged a framework for a religious settlement. The Act of Supremacy, which reaffirmed the crown's spiritual authority in England, and the Act of Uniformity, which mandated the use of a revised prayer book based on the *BCP 1552*, were hallmarks of compromise. The former replaced the term 'Supreme Head' with the term 'Supreme Governor,' a title whose terminology was more palatable to Elizabeth's opponents, while the latter gave the English a prayer book that left room for broad interpretation during a time when Catholic, Lutheran, and Swiss reformed theologies were vying for ascendancy. It is important to note that it was also under the reign of Elizabeth that the Thirty-nine Articles were

written. These articles form a statement of the doctrinal position of the Church of England with respect to the various theological issues of the sixteenth century. With the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity, these articles exemplify the spirit of comprehensiveness and compromise that are foundational to our understanding of Anglican theology.

*Ignoring Conflict for the Sake of Unity*⁸

In a complete departure from the example of settling conflict through compromise, the response of the Episcopal Church to the American Civil War is a fine example of ignoring reality to avoid conflict. It is also emblematic of the Church's tendency to be untidy, undisciplined, unsystematic, and episodic when dealing theologically with social issues. Unlike other denominations, the Episcopal Church did not formally divide over the issue of slavery. As a result of its abhorrence of schism, and realizing that that resolutions on slavery would inevitably bring disputes, the Church avoided taking an official stand on human bondage. In both the North and the South, there were Episcopalians who defended the legitimacy of slavery, as well as those who were opposed the practice. Many southern Episcopalians were slave owners, including bishops; many northern members, most notably Presiding Bishop John Henry Hopkins, sympathized with friends and relatives in the South. The voices of anti-slavery and

⁷ See Thompsett, *LWH*, pp. 92-107, and David L. Holmes, *A Brief History of the Episcopal Church*, (Valley Forge 1993), pp. 1-18.

⁸ See Thompsett, *LWH*, pp. 110-123, Holmes, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-87, and Robert E. Hood, *Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church: A Source Book*, (Harrisburg 1990), pp. 65-66, 101-129.

abolitionist Episcopalians was ignored by the General Convention of 1862 in favor of those who argued for ecclesiastical reconciliation with the churches of the Confederacy. Pastoral letters from the bishops in 1862 and 1868 failed to address slavery and the plight of blacks in America. This failure to take a stand at a major crossroad in history has resulted in a sorry record on race relations and dealings with other minorities in the life of the Episcopal Church well into the latter half of the twentieth century.

*Welcoming Conflict and Embracing Change: The Late Victorian Era*⁹

During the last third of the nineteenth century, Anglicans in England and America were confronted with a 'crisis of faith' brought on by discoveries in historical and scientific criticism. Many believed that long-held religious truths were under attack from the development of evolutionary theory and new discoveries in biblical criticism. The English church responded in a collection of essays edited by Charles Gore entitled *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation*. The authors of these essays 'boldly shaped a method that invited modern Anglicans to welcome new knowledge as an ally rather than an enemy of catholic, incarnational Christianity,' and stressed reasonable and free discussion that would eventually lead to acceptance of new methods in biblical study and new scientific developments. For a time, the American church was slower to adapt to the intellectual challenges of the times, but unlike many Protestant denominations, the Episcopal Church gradually assimilated the revolutionary

⁹ Thompsett, *LWH*, pp. 123-130; Holmes, *op cit.*, pp. 116-122.

intellectual trends of the era. The Episcopal Theological School was a center for these new intellectual forces and set the pace for the inclusion of higher criticism into the curriculum of the Church seminaries. By 1899, the Lambeth Conference and the Episcopal House of Bishops have affirmed the critical historical study of the Bible. The ability of Anglicanism to accept these changes with relative ease can be said to stem from its conception of comprehensiveness and from the expression of its faith in terms of the historic creeds and the *Book of Common Prayer* rather than through an official doctrine of the literal inerrancy of Scripture.

Three periods of history, three styles of conflict engagement. I want to counterpoint these three examples with the contemporary examples of prayer book revision, human sexuality, and my thesis proposal.

Resolution and Compromise: Prayer Book Revision in America

In 1964, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church directed the Standing Liturgical Commission to begin the process of prayer book revision through the submission of trial rites for use and discussion by congregations. This process allowed for both liturgical experimentation and feedback from the parishes and dioceses. While there had been opposition to prayer book revisions in 1892 and 1928, it was mild compared to the outcry that followed the revisions leading up to the *Book of Common Prayer 1979*. Familiar, comfortable language and long-known liturgical styles were replaced with

contemporary idioms and new rites. Coincident as it was with social upheavals around race and gender, the revision of the 1928 prayer book was very unsettling for many Episcopalians. A number of the more conservative and traditionalist members left the Church following the failed attempts of such groups as the Society for the Preservation of the Prayer Book to either halt revision or to retain the 1928 prayer book as an alternative rite. Debates raged in parishes, diocesan conventions, General Conventions, and in the pages of Episcopal publications. For many of the conservatives who remained, the traditional language of Rite I was an acceptable compromise. Fifteen years of trial use, liturgies, time for conversation and reflection, and ready access to the theological process of revision, has shown that compromise is a valuable part of conflict resolution.

Ignoring Conflict: Human Sexuality

Although the Episcopal Church has long engaged in debates about human sexuality, particularly around the issue of homosexuality, a majority of the Church has chosen to ignore the conversation in hopes that it will just go away. For many, there is nothing to talk about – the Bible condemns homosexual relations, case closed; others are tired of the conversation, tired of the resolutions presented at diocesan and General Convention, and tired of the lack of definitive resolution one way or another. Following Lambeth 1998 and its resounding support of a resolution which states that homosexual relations are incompatible with Christian sexual ethics, the current Presiding Bishop has called for a moratorium on human sexuality resolutions at the next General Convention.

He and other bishops of both the American Church and the wider Anglican Communion have observed that some concerns do not lend themselves to a vote. In a statement reminiscent of past calls for church unity at the expense of a minority, Presiding Bishop Frank T. Griswold has said: ‘We have learned from Lambeth that passing resolutions doesn’t resolve the issue. . . questions can remain and the divisions can be very deep. So I think we have been trying to find a way to live our lives and do this for the sake of the larger church.’ These sentiments are shared by many in the Church who do not want to continue the dialogue and who would prefer to ignore the conversation. Human sexuality, let alone homosexuality, is a difficult topic for conversation, anathema to most people.

Welcoming Conflict: Liturgical Dialogue

In the final chapter of *Living With History*, Fredrica Harris Thompsett lists seven principles for ways that we in the Episcopal Church can welcome and engage conflict: 1) Seek common ground; 2) value conversation; 3) Seek the broadest understanding; 4) Appreciate ambiguity; 5) Make room for imagination; 6) Ask questions; and 7) Encourage one another. These guidelines, informed by the history of Anglicanism, should indeed prove useful in working through the inevitable disputes that can arise within the communities of the Church. I believe that Anglican history and theology truly invites us to welcome and to intentionally engage any issue that confronts our communities, whether they are contemporary issues such as racism and heterosexism or trying to

answer some of the favorite questions asked by Anglicans: ‘What is Anglicanism?’ Is there such a thing as Anglican theology?’ Michael Ramsey offers an answer to the latter:

There is such a thing as Anglican theology and it is sorely needed at the present day. But because it is neither a system nor a confession (the idea of an Anglican ‘confessionalism’ suggests something that has never been and never can be) but a method, a use, and a direction, it cannot be defined or even perceived as a ‘thing in itself,’ and it may elude the eyes of those who ask “What is it?” and “Where is it?” It has been proved, and will be proved again, by its fruits and its works.¹⁰

I am struck by Ramsey’s assertion that Anglican theology ‘is sorely needed at the present day.’ Written almost fifty-five years ago, his words are as equally true today as they were at the end of the Second World War. What does Anglican theology have to offer us today? What are the fruits and works of Anglican theology? I believe that they are best exemplified by the prayer book, incarnational theology, and Richard Hooker’s three-legged stool of theological inquiry, scripture, reason, and tradition.

And I believe that if we can worship through the issues and concerns of the Church today, using topical lectionaries, and participating in conversations using Thompsett’s guidelines and the principles of Dozier’s bible studies, we can welcome any conversation and move from contention to transformation.

I cannot help but wonder to what extent this spirit of resolution and compromise is a uniquely Anglican phenomenon in the annals of liturgical renewal and revision during times of institutional upheaval or when change is not welcome. Neither the Roman Catholic Church, with the changes brought about by Vatican II between 1962 and 1965,

nor the Lutheran churches, with the revisions brought about with the *Service Book and Hymnal* (1958) and again with the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978), experienced the degree of turmoil and debate that engulfed the Episcopal Church between 1964 and 1979. Where changes in the Roman tradition were decreed by the Vatican hierarchy and the Lutherans worked collegially among the various branches of the tradition, the Episcopal Church process resulted in a high degree of controversy. This is not to say that the Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches did not experience some degree of resistance to changes in the liturgy. Despite the popularity of vernacular masses among Roman Catholic laity, many, primarily among the older generations, experienced angst and discomfort following the demise of the Latin mass; likewise there were pockets of resistance to liturgical changes in the Lutheran churches. Yet neither of these traditions experienced anything quite like the turmoil and controversy that surrounded the revision of the *Book of Common Prayer*. Why is this the case and is it significant?

In order to attempt to answer this question and to ascertain the significance of why these three denominations reacted differently to liturgical renewal, we need to understand the impact of the influences that shaped liturgical theology and liturgical revision in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These influences, known as the Liturgical Movement, grew out of the ecclesiastical response to the forces of secularism, namely the modern propensity toward individualism and rationalism that questioned the relevance of religion and worship. With its roots in nineteenth-century Europe, the Liturgical Movement reflected a shift in our understanding from ‘church as coterminous

¹⁰ Quoted in James F. Griffiss, ed., *To Believe is to Pray: Readings from Michael Ramsey*, (Cambridge

with society to church as set apart from society in a pluralistic culture which no longer looks to the church as a unifying force in society or as a source of common wisdom.’¹¹ Its causes were complex, but we can trace the roots of liturgical revision to the Romantic notions of returning to origins; to the reactions to the Enlightenment; to the social tensions of produced by the shift from agricultural to industrial society; and the resultant renewal of interest in liturgy brought about by Protestants and Roman Catholics who sought to restore the eucharist to the center of religious experience. While it is not within the scope of this discussion to recount the history of the Liturgical Movement, it will be necessary to discuss the implications of the movement on the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Episcopal churches in North America.

D. The Liturgical Movement in North America¹²

While most elements of the Liturgical Movement in the United States paralleled those in Europe, the North American experience of the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Episcopal traditions were marked by their own peculiar manifestations.

The dissemination of the Liturgical Movement that was pioneered in Europe was initially centered at St. John’s Abby in Collegeville, Minnesota, and guided by Dom

1996) pp. 44-47.

¹¹ Michael Moriarty, *The Liturgical Revolution: Prayer Book Revision and Associated Parishes: A Generation of Change in the Episcopal Church*, (New York 1996), p. 3.

¹² The following discussion is based on chapters from: John Fenwick and Brian Spinks, *Worship in Transition: The Liturgical Movement in the Twentieth Century*, (New York 1995), pp.187-194; Peyton G. Craighill, *Liturgy and Piety: A Study of Three Eucharistic Rites in the Episcopal Church*, (Dissertation, Princeton 1972), pp. 101-123; and Timothy C.J. Quill, *The Impact of the Liturgical Movement on American Lutheranism*, (London 1997), pp. 1-26; Holmes, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-115.; and Moriarty, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-12.

Virgil Michel. With the blessings and support of his congregation, Michel founded the journal *Orate Fratres* in 1926 for the purpose spreading the work of the Liturgical Movement. Subsequently renamed *Worship*, the purpose of the journal was ‘the wider spread of the true understanding of, and participation in, the Church’s worship by the general laity in order to foster the corporate life of the natural social units of the Church – the parishes.’ The second was the founding of the Liturgical Press which, among other works, published English translations of the European movement. Many of the scholars who wrote for the journal and were published by the press were leading advocates for the “Dialogue Mass” (which allowed for lay participation and response) and vernacular liturgies. These revolutionary suggestions, made decades before the Second Vatican Council, were not welcomed by all Catholic groups. These American scholars and their European counterparts paved the way for both the dissemination of the principles of the Liturgical Movement among various Christian denominations and the liturgical revisions of Vatican II.

In North America there have been several separate Lutheran groups originating from different ethnic or language groups, or internal Lutheran disputes. Many of these groups have since merged to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA). Prior to this union, the main groups – the Lutheran Church of America, the American Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada, and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, formed the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship in 1966 in an attempt to produce a common worship book. Each of these synodical groups had been influenced in some measure by the Liturgical

Movement. Between 1969 and 1975, the ILCW worked with theologians, musicians, pastors, and congregations to produce a series of trial liturgies; after experiment and debate, these were brought together to produce the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1979). It is ironic that the Missouri Synod, who had been the main instigator for the formation of the Inter-Lutheran Commission, would condemn the new book for having too many departures from traditional Lutheran liturgy and for having a ‘Rome-ward’ direction. Be that as it may, the *LBW* captures the spirit of the Liturgical Movement, particularly in the return to early Christian roots in its restoration of Holy Baptism to its historic liturgical rank implied in Lutheran theology and the involvement of lay persons in assisting the minister in the liturgy. The significance of holy communion was also affirmed; more and more the eucharist has become the central celebration for the Sunday services of the ELCA. Perhaps the relative ease with which the Lutheran Church brought its new worship book to fruition stems from both the dialogical process and the experience of previous revisions of its liturgy and hymnody as the church moved from its German and Scandinavian roots and embraced the process of integration into Anglo-American culture. Additionally, the Lutheran theological tradition, grounded in the Reformation and the *Book of Concord*, provides a strong foundation for confronting the concerns of the church.

The influences of the Liturgical Movement were manifested in the Episcopal Church through scholarship and liturgical revision. Particularly since the end of the Second World War, scholars such as Edward L. Parsons, Massey Shepherd Jr., Marion Hatchett, Lionel Mitchell, and Louis Weil have played prominent roles in the study and

dissemination of the tenets of the movement. Following the revision of the *Book of Common Prayer* in 1928, General Convention created the Standing Liturgical Commission (SLC) to prepare for future revisions of the prayer book. During the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, these and other scholars influenced by the Liturgical Movement laid the foundations for the work of the SLC. It can be said that when General Convention adopted the *BCP 1979* it committed the Church to the teachings of the Liturgical Movement. In order to understand what the movement teaches and how it has influenced the Episcopal Church, we need only to compare the worship practices of the 1928 prayer book with those of its successor.

In most parishes today, congregations participate more fully in the worship: lay people read the lessons and the prayers, carry the bread and the wine to the altar for consecration, and assist in the administration of the elements. The principle service of a parish is holy communion and the clergy face the congregation when celebrating. Baptism has become an important community celebration. The three-year lectionary allows the people to engage large portions of the Bible through readings and sermons. Some of these practices existed in Episcopal worship prior to 1979; others did not. Many of these elements are derived from the earliest Christian practices that the Liturgical Movement has promulgated as a result of recent scholarly discoveries and the re-appropriation of ancient rites. The retention of traditional language in the Rite I services of the current Prayer Book provide a sense continuity with the worship of Anglicans from the time of Cranmer to the recent past of the 1928 Prayer Book.

Perhaps one of the greatest gifts of the Liturgical Movement was the revision of the church year calendar and the 3-year lectionary instigated by the Second Vatican Council. The three-year lectionary format was adopted by the Episcopal and Lutheran churches and by many Protestant denominations. The revision of the lectionary affirms the centrality of Holy Scripture and forms the content for the liturgy of the Word. The 3-year lectionary and its format of readings from Hebrew Scriptures, Psalms, and the Epistles and Gospels of the New Testament has allowed for broader exposure to biblical texts and more opportunities to explore the role of scripture in our lives as the Body of Christ.

Upheaval and great social change in both America and abroad characterized the periods leading up to and including the liturgical revolutions launched by Vatican II, the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship, and the Standing Liturgical Commission. To varying degrees, these liturgical revisions were met with suspicion, resistance, and controversy. What may be unique about the reactions of Episcopalians lies in the significance of the role that the *Book of Common Prayer* plays in the lives of virtually each and every member of the Church. The Prayer Book is an important aspect of Anglican identity and life and has no parallels in other faith traditions. The liturgical books employed by the Roman Catholic Church are very specific – the *Sacramentary*, *Rites*, and *Rites II* are for use by clergy in the conduct of worship, and the *Liturgy of the Hours* is a multi-volume set that is used to some degree by the laity, but generally used primarily by the clergy and religious for daily devotions. While the Presbyterians, the Methodists, and the United Church of Christ stand out as denominations who, along with

the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, have excellent standard books of worship, their general use is quite different from that of the prayer books used by Episcopalians and other Anglicans.

These books, like the *Book of Common Prayer* are the products of the Reformation, forged by centuries of use, and revised from time to time by faithful and careful consideration. I want to turn now to some reflections on the theological and historical significance of the development of the prayer book tradition in general and the American Prayer Book in particular.

Some reflections on the significance of the Prayer Book

As the Church continues the celebration of the four hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the *Book of Common Prayer*, this is an auspicious time to reflect on the role of the Prayer Book in the identity and the life of the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion. We have seen how the spirit of resolution and compromise have brought the *Book of Common Prayer* through the vicissitudes of political and religious intrigue in the sixteenth century, and the turmoil of liturgical revision in the politically and socially turbulent twentieth. I want to explore how that spirit has shaped the prayer book and makes the BCP an ideal vehicle for moving the Church from contention to transformation.

The history of the Prayer Book is a history of revision, contention, controversy, and resolution. Forged in the crucible of the Reformation and the political intrigue that was part and parcel of the monarchy, the *Book of Common Prayer* has known five

incarnations (1549, 1552, 1559, 1604, and 1662 – six if you count the *Alternative Service Book 1980*) in England, and has gone through four revisions in America (1789, 1892, 1928, and 1978) since the 1662 edition came to these shores with the early colonists. Throughout its four-hundred and fifty year history, the *BCP* has been the primary standard as to what an Anglican believes and as to how an Anglican is to serve God.¹³ Although it has been revised and adapted over the years for use by the various provinces of the Anglican Communion, the Prayer Book has become the hallmark of Anglican identity and life.

The progenitor of all Anglican prayer books is the 1549 *Booke of the Common Prayer and Administracion of the Sacramentes, and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Churche After the Use of the Churche of England*, written by Thomas Cranmer in response to the Reformation. The creation of a single book, written in the vernacular, stands in sharp contrast to the various medieval books used exclusively by the clergy (missal, breviary, manual, pontifical, and customary). Cranmer's creation simplified the complexities of the multiple liturgical books and the supplemental ritual directions, provided all services in the vernacular, and, because of its low cost, put the Prayer Book into the hands of the laity. One book, simplified liturgies, and the use of the English language resulted the rediscovery of the most basic Christian liturgical principle, namely that the worship of the church is corporate, not just the private enclave of the clergy.

The prayer book of 1549 was in many respects a conservative reform of the old Latin rite. There were significant innovations, such as reading large portions of the Bible

¹³ Marion J. Hatchett, "Prayer Books," p.131, in Sykes, Booty, and Knight, *op. cit.*, pp.131-143.

at the morning and evening services of the Daily Office and, most importantly, was written in English and put into the hands of the people. In the spirit of the Reformation, this prayer book acknowledged the rediscovery of the worship of the early church and the liturgical principle that worship is the work of the people.¹⁴ However, Jeffrey Lee writes:

No one was satisfied with the 1549 prayer book. (All prayer books seem to suffer this fate!) It fell victim to the politics and religious upheavals of its time, as some felt this prayer book was only a first step toward further changes while others wanted a return to the old rite. It was during the Reformation that public prayer came to be not only a sign of religious orthodoxy – whether Protestant or Catholic – but also of allegiance to the state.¹⁵

In response to the political and religious climate of the day, a second prayer book was issued in 1552 and had a decidedly Calvinist cast and moved the Church further from its Roman roots. This book was short-lived, falling victim to the death of Edward VI and the assumption to the throne of staunch Roman Catholic, Mary, and a return pre-Reformation liturgical forms. After three bloody years, Elizabeth came to the throne and returned the prayer book to prominence with the 1552 version as part of the Elizabethan Compromise.

The *Book of Common Prayer* was revised again in 1604 and yet again in 1662 with the restoration of the monarchy following the commonwealth period of English history. The preface of this edition, which is still the official prayer book of the Church of England, pays homage to the needs for revision:

¹⁴ See Jeffrey Lee, *Opening the Prayer Book*, (Cambridge 1999), pp. 50-51.

¹⁵ Lee, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

It hath been the wisdom of the Church of England, ever since the first compiling of her Publik Liturgy, to keep the mean between the two extremes, of too much stiffness in refusing, and of too much easiness in admitting any variation from it. For, as on the one side common experience sheweth, that where a change hath been made of things advisedly established. . . sundry inconveniences have thereupon ensued; and those many times more and greater than the evils, that were intended to be remedied by such change: So on the other side, the particular Forms of Divine worship, and the Rites and Ceremonies appointed to be used therein, being things in there own nature indifferent, and alterable. . . it is but reasonable that upon weighty and important consideration, according to the various exigency of times and occasions, such changes and alterations should be made therein, as to those that are in place of Authority should from time to time seem either necessary or expedient. Accordingly we find, that in the Reigns of several Princes of blessed memory since the Reformation, the Church, upon just and weighty considerations her thereunto moving, hath yielded to make such alterations in some particulars, as in their respective times were thought convenient.

These words are very different in tone than those of the preface to the first prayer book and its emphasis on the ideals of returning worship to ‘godly and decent order of the ancient fathers.’ Yet, the framers of both prayer books sought to justify and affirm their reasons for revision.

The history of the *Book of Common Prayer* is one of response and compromise to the often inter-related issues of political, social, and theological changes. In America, prayer book revision was required following the Revolutionary War due to the need to eliminate references to the monarchy and Parliament, as well as for theological and liturgical considerations. Likewise, the revision of 1892 was as much about the response to the changing demographics of the nineteenth century as it was about liturgical changes that would allow for shorter services and more flexibility in worship that was being advocated by such figures as William Augustus Muhlenberg and William Reed

Huntington. Although the changes were few, the 1892 revision made it clear that liturgical revision was both necessary and possible, and paved the way for the changes that resulted in the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer* and later in the creation of the 1979 *BCP*.

Each revision brought varying degrees of changes in theological perspectives and understanding of the role of daily prayer, baptism, the eucharist, confirmation, prayers for the visitation of the sick, the prayers for the dead, the pastoral offices, and the use of scripture in Anglican and Episcopal worship. And with each revision came varying degrees of support and opposition to the changes. Across four centuries, these changes came about primarily as a result of resolution through compromise. The significance of Prayer Book revision on theology can be better understood in the context of liturgical theology.

CHAPTER II

A. Models of Liturgical Theology

The liturgical act is the primary and foundational theological act from which all subsequent theological activity arises. This is the classical definition of liturgical theology. What is liturgical theology? While scholarship has not clearly settled a definition of liturgical theology, it may be best understood as a theological system with its various branches informed by the experience of worship and reflection upon that experience. Liturgical theology studies both how the faith experiences of worshippers come to expression in the symbolic text and action of ritual and the effect that liturgy has on faith itself. It is the study of the mystery of faith. I want to broaden this understanding to include the wider implications of what may happen to our theological positions when we engage new and specific bodies of scripture in our worship. Further, I believe that these models can illuminate the *lex agendi* that flows from the *lex orandi*, *lex credendi*. I want to first explore the models of liturgical theology offered by James Empereur,¹⁶ Gordon Lathrop,¹⁷ and Frank C. Senn,¹⁸ before turning to the works of Elizabeth J. Smith and Eric H. F. Law.

¹⁶ James Empereur, *Models of Liturgical Theology*, Alcuin/Grow Liturgical Study 4, (Bramcote 1987). Hereafter referred to as *MLT*. Also *Worship: Exploring the Sacred*, (Washington 1987). Hereafter referred to as *WES*.

¹⁷ Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology*, (Minneapolis 1993). Hereafter referred to as *HT*.

¹⁸ Frank C. Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical*, (Minneapolis 1997). Hereafter referred to as *CL*.

In *Models of Liturgical Theology*, James Empereur offers seven liturgical theological models useful to the assessment of how the faith experiences of worshippers come to expression in the symbolic texts and actions of ritual and the effect that these liturgical models have on faith and action. I quote them in some detail because they are crucial to the application of this analysis. Empereur writes:

[In the *institutional model*], liturgy can be most clearly evaluated by its visible structures. If the ritual is done well, the various ministers function appropriately, and the congregation participates fully, then God's grace will be most completely actualized in the church's worship. The primary image of this model is that of the liturgy as a visible rite. This view considers the liturgy primarily in terms of its ritual structure, its differentiation of roles, and its procedure which is governed by rubrical legislation. It stresses that, if liturgy is to be liturgy at all, it must have some kind of visibility, some leadership, and some accepted mode of procedure. Liturgy according to this model is something which is performed by the presiders for the participants. (*MLT* p. 13)

This model reinforces the clericalism that Countryman, Thompsett, and Dozier emphasize. Elements of this model have been pervasive in the Episcopal Church throughout the twentieth century. While many of the changes brought about by prayer book revision in 1979 have lessened this model's hold on Episcopal liturgy, institutional influences are still strongly present in our liturgical practices. This model is most evident in those congregations who call themselves *conservative* and/or *traditionalist*.

Just as there is structure, procedure, and guidelines in the liturgical practices of this model, there is an expectation of order in the spiritual dimensions as well. In this *lex orandi, lex credendi* what is essential to the liturgy cannot be changed and implies that

one's relationship to God is unchanging. The *lex agendi* is the maintenance of the *status quo* and tends to be shaped by those in authority and thus subject to clericalism.

The second model, which is generally strongly present in Eastern Orthodox traditions, is the *mystery model*

where the paschal event, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is not merely recalled or commemorated. This mystery of salvation is actually made present in the sacred rite, and our participation is not simply attendance but a full involvement of presence in that paschal mystery. The central image of the mystery model is the church in the act of memorializing. Liturgy equals anamnesis. (*MLT* p. 17)

Here, the church exists for liturgy, rather than liturgy being in the service of the church. This is an inward-looking model that keeps a community from perceiving the needs of those on the margins. This model is often evident in the High Church and Anglo-Catholic liturgies of the Episcopal Church.

The other-worldly spirituality of the mystery model can become an end in itself. There is no bridge between the Paschal Christ and the daily deaths and resurrections of ordinary life. Spirituality and liturgy become a world within a world, an end unto themselves. This inward-looking spirituality can be highly exclusionary.

A widely used model of liturgical theology is the *sacramental model*. In this model,

the church is Christ's body and the liturgy can be seen as the fullest expression of what it means to be church. It is an outward symbol of a present spiritual reality. This reality, God's life, seeks visibility, and finds itself really present in the gathered worshipping assembly. In this model, liturgy means the worshipping, grace filled community. (*MLT* pp. 21-22)

This is a highly incarnational model, grounded in the images of the Body of Christ and the people of God that is central to the notion of the church as community. This model is strongly present in the liturgy for Holy Baptism in the *Book of Common Prayer*.

The spirituality of the sacramental model is highly incarnational. It can be distinguished by its concern to express the dynamism of grace which is found beneath the structure of the church and our personalities.¹⁹ Because sacramental spirituality points to union with God and with neighbor, its focus is on inclusion.

Strongly evangelical and kerygmatic,

the *proclamation model* of liturgical theology is one in which the dialogic relationship of God to the world is made evident in the structure and shape of the liturgy. In the words and actions of the liturgy, God proclaims the word, Jesus Christ. We, the church, respond to the same word, humanly dwelling with us. That response must be for us a moment of faith and decision. Thus the primary image of the liturgy according to this model is that of Christ and his community proclaiming and responding. (*MLT* p. 26)

This model emphasizes evangelization and conversion. When the proclamation model is predominant, there is a tendency toward fundamentalism and the liturgy becomes a place of personal witness. Elements of this model are pervasive in many of this Church's evangelical and charismatic parishes.

Proclamatory spirituality stresses community, but community as an event of shared language and shared vision. Reverence for the Word tends to emphasize an absolutist perception of the Bible. Personal witness de-emphasizes institutional and sacramental aspects of the liturgy. When the proclamation model takes over the liturgy,

dialogue ceases. The *lex agendi* can tend to lack insight and understanding of culture and society.

In the *process model*,

liturgy is an event always in process. The God whom the liturgy celebrates is a changing God who interacts with the world as being both its creator and being created by it. The worshipping community and the Christ of the liturgy are constantly evolving. Through the liturgy the worshippers appropriate the past, relate to the present, and respond to the allurements of the future. If there is an image of the liturgy in the process model, it would be the world at worship. (*MLT* p. 31)

This model understands God as being affected by what takes place in the liturgy and that God is concerned with the desires and problems of the worshipping community. Liturgy, in this model, reflects and clarifies how God is part of the world. Ecumenical events often employ this model. An example of this model can also be found in the liturgical practices of the Church of the Redeemer in Morristown, New Jersey.

Process spirituality stresses one's spirituality in the experience of one's unity with the universe and humanity. It also emphasizes a highly relational way of being in the world and the directionality of one's spiritual life as that which gives identity. While stressing union based on relationality, process spirituality tends to be vague about the meaning of community and must be constantly intentional in addressing ambiguity and meaning.

Similar to the process model is the *therapeutic model*, in which

¹⁹ Empereur, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

the incarnation shows us that God is most fully and clearly met in human interaction and experience. Our stories – our joys and sorrows, conversations and transformations – make sense only within the Christian story related in the liturgy. Human growth is consistent, even synonymous, with holiness and salvation. The primary image of the liturgy according to this model is Christian storytelling celebrated. (*MLT* p. 35)

This is an interesting model, both in terms of its emphasis on storytelling and the importance of the non-verbal. Here the breaking of the bread, the kiss of peace, bodily movements, and gestures enhance understanding. This is a phenomenological model in that it attempts to speak of divine reality in the language of ordinary human experience. It stresses salvation in terms of humanization because it wishes to use more therapeutic images and concepts.²⁰

Therapeutic spirituality embraces the concept that something is going on in the growth process of human beings that cannot be adequately explained. Many who articulate their spirituality from within this model are not comfortable with much of the traditional language of liturgy and prayer in the church. Therapeutic spirituality tends to under-value the communal dimension of one's relationship to God.

Finally, Empereur explicates the most contemporary of his models of liturgical theology in the *liberation model* in which

the liturgy is the place where we experience in anticipation as well as rehearse the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. It becomes the paradigm of the breaking down of all human division and inequality. . . . The image of the liturgy according to the liberation model is the liturgy as the rehearsal of the kingdom or as kingdom play. According to this model this image is the best re-description of the root metaphor of Christianity.

²⁰ Empereur, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

Obviously, this model of liturgical theology will view God, Christ, the worshipping assembly, and the ritual actions from a liberation perspective. Both explicitly and implicitly, the liturgy will present a strong prophetic vision. (*MLT* pp. 39-40)

In this model, liturgy is a place of witness for those who wish to manifest their commitment to the marginalized and for the marginalized in turn to offer their own ministry to them. Use of the liberation model is made manifest in worship through its acknowledgement of justice in terms of the ministerial roles in the liturgy. The ritual structures themselves should break down distinctions of sex, age, race, class, or economy. The chapel services at EDS tend to employ this model, as does the Church of the Redeemer.

Liberation spirituality emphasizes an ethic of responsibility. This model of spirituality is done in solidarity with one's sisters and brothers so that prayer, inside and outside of the liturgy, is a perceptible covenant with humankind. While there is a strong sense of personal commitment in this form of spirituality, the *lex agendi* calls for the work of the kingdom in the here and now. A liberation model of liturgical spirituality, like all models, has its limitations. Most tellingly:

Specific problems may develop from an over-emphasis on the liberation model. For those who find themselves in a situation of being oppressors, it might mean that they would consider worshipping itself sufficient to achieve justice. On the other hand, the liturgy could make them feel so guilty that they are overwhelmed and unable to move to concrete action. For the oppressed, there is the possibility that the liturgy could inject a sense of unreality in their lives, romanticizing their daily lives as better than they really are. Or the liturgy could so mobilize their angers that worship becomes a way of correcting societal wrongs. For both oppressor and oppressed, liturgy can become too pragmatic, too easily manipulable.

Then there is no room for wonder, awe, fascination, and mystery. (*MLT* p. 44.)

The other most telling limitation can be found in the avoidance of personal issues and all growth in favor of strategy planning to bring about a better world.

I would suggest that there is another model that is operative in some places in the Church that could be called the *de-institutional model*. In this model, the institutional model is rejected outright, as are most elements of the other models, with the possible exception of the liberation model. Adherents of this model tend to reject a majority of the traditions of the liturgical practices of the Church, citing that they are all oppressive to women, ethnic and racial minorities, and lesbian and gay people. While well-intentioned, there is a tendency toward assuming that everyone is included and affirmed in this model. Self-reflection and self-assessment are done primarily by a small number of people who feel that they are making the best decisions for the community.

Spirituality can be fragmented in this model. There are few shared beliefs in a community that experiments with a wide variety of liturgical forms. Individuals and groups within such a community often continue to feel marginalized because their needs are not being met. Trying to be all things to all people, the community enters a cycle of continuously re-inventing the wheel and never develops a spiritual center that can ground and form the community. Spiritual nurture is fragmented when context and vision is not clear.

I have quoted James Empereur at length because these models, particularly the institutional, sacramental, and proclamation models are essential to understanding how

Episcopalians may appropriate various theological positions through their interactions with the liturgy. Each of these models can also help us to understand manifestations of the clericalism (as can result from the institutional model) that concern Countryman, Thompsett, and Dozier. Further, these models can point to ways that can free clergy and laity, both within and outside of the liturgy (as in the application of the liberation model).

B. Theories of Liturgical Theology

Each of these models describes structures in which a worshipping community can engage in liturgical theology. The meaning of the liturgy resides in the liturgy itself; the liturgy itself is primary theology. Primary liturgical theology is the communal meaning of the liturgy as it is carried out by the assembly. Secondary liturgical theology is the written and spoken discourse that attempts to define and describe the experience of the liturgy. Gordon Lathrop, in *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology*, adds a third element, pastoral liturgical theology, the act of reflecting and acting upon specific problems within the experience and understanding of the liturgy. Where primary and secondary liturgical theologies deal with what is, pastoral liturgical theology addresses what could be. It is the critical process by which the liturgy is evaluated and encouraged toward renewal. This thesis project is an application of pastoral liturgical theology in so far as it seeks renewal and transformation of the worshipping community through liturgy.

Lathrop suggests that *lex orandi*, (primary liturgical theology), *lex credendi* (secondary liturgical theology) must be enacted, must become the *lex agendi* (pastoral liturgical theology). He writes:

This 'critical function of liturgiology' includes at least two kinds of reforming interest: concern about the actual celebration and its health, and concern about 'liturgical spirituality,' about the participants living out in life the implications of the communal liturgy. (*HT*, Cf. p. 7)

In its evaluation of the liturgical assembly, Lathrop stresses, liturgical criticism raises a number of questions:²¹ Does the community meet on Sunday with a sense of lively counterpoint to the whole week? Are the scriptures read at the center of the meeting as if they were the book of life itself? By one text set next to another and by the whole broken open by preaching, is the synaxis made to speak of God's grace in Christ? Is the meal held? Is it seen to be the eating and drinking of the meaning of the scriptures? Is this word and meal understood as taking place in a hungry city and a hungry world? Liturgical criticism, in the context of pastoral liturgical theology, seeks to begin to answer these questions.

Liturgical criticism is exercised by doing the next liturgy. The community doing liturgy will be remembering the series of rituals that the participants have known; they will be reorganizing, reinterpreting, and reforming its memories through ongoing ritual reenactment. Lathrop is quick to note that

[f]rom our current experience, however, several hard questions are put to our ritual memories, demanding some place for specific and significant

²¹ Lathrop, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

change in the next liturgies we do. Has not the liturgical tradition – both the local memories and the more ancient ones – been mostly marked by professional leaders doing the rituals for a largely passive assembly? Regardless of the theory of ideal communal participation, would not almost everyone’s memory be filled mostly with such professionally dominated rituals? And have not those professional leaders generally been men, their rituals often full of male imagery and male experience? As our culture increasingly is able to think about the meaning of women and men together, what will occur in our liturgical assemblies? Furthermore, if there is a shared pattern discernible in all the varieties of Christian worship, does the reinforcement of the centrality of that pattern imply uniformity? Is Christian experience to be closed to diversity? Are we to have a further homogenizing of the liturgy and the arts of liturgy around assumed Western and male dominance? What is the image of social order that our liturgies project? (*HT* pp. 180-181)

Here Lathrop is offering a liturgical theological critique of the trends deplored by Countryman, Thompsett, and Dozier.

I am struck by Lathrop’s discussion of the dimensions and perceptions of leadership in the church, particularly because it is couched in the context of liturgical theology. Writing that there is a crisis in the understanding of Christian leadership everywhere, Lathrop points to the practices of selecting, electing, and appointing bishops used by various denominations, the growing concern among Protestants around the ability of small congregations to sustain full-time ministries, and the ministerial ‘caste system’ that separates clergy from laity, as examples of the kinds of problems that exist in the leadership of the church. In order to address these issues and concerns, he suggests that answers and solutions can be found in the liturgy as historically understood and contemporaneously practiced.²²

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 180-203.

Although the history of Christian liturgy has been written many times by many competent liturgists, Frank Senn, in *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical*, is at the forefront of liturgical scholarship that focuses on the implications of studying Christian liturgy from the point of view of its cultural setting. From a scholarly standpoint, this approach weans liturgical scholars away from their preoccupation with textual analysis. From a practical standpoint, understanding liturgy in its cultural contexts enables us to better understand the church in its public mode.²³

Senn writes:

There is no doubt that liturgy has been influenced by the culture and people who have performed it in every stage of its development. There are no aspects of Christian liturgy that are not derived from the various cultures through which it has passed in its historical evolution (e.g., Jewish meals, Greek rhetoric, Roman models of leadership, Byzantine court ceremonial, Mediterranean solstice festivals, etc.). Each of these cultural expressions has been transformed by use in Christian observance to contribute toward the formation of an ecclesiastical culture. (*CL* p. 676)

When missionaries bring their faith to a new country, it is necessary to adapt this faith and its practices to local forms of cultural expression, since the faith and practice of missionaries cannot be replicated in a new location. Such adaptation requires the translation of texts and utilization of local forms of expression – music, art, architecture, for example – within the forms and orders brought to a local culture. True inculturation means replacing these forms and orders with indigenous forms and orders.

The issues of adaptation and inculturation have loomed large in non-Western societies because of the need to disentangle Christianity from the Western culture

²³ Senn, *op. cit.*, p. xv.

imposed during periods of colonialization and domination. In addition, issues of cross-cultural or multi-cultural liturgy in which the expression of foreign or minority cultures have predominated in Western cultures, particularly in the pluralistic culture of North America. Attempts to include people of various ethnic and racial backgrounds have met with varying degrees of success. This has not been an easy task because the dominate group does not easily surrender its forms of expression, nor does it find it easy to reach out to include expressions from other groups. Many mainline churches have endeavored to be inclusive through the appropriation of African-American and Spanish-language songs from Central and South America. Similarly, efforts have been made, again with varying degrees of success, to reach out to women and the unchurched through such efforts as inclusive language, modern music, and high-tech media (particularly in non-liturgical denominations). These efforts rub uncomfortably against the norms, expectations, and traditions of the dominant culture.

Senn concludes that the experience of liturgy is frustrated when liturgists attend exclusively with doctrinal precision, textual accuracy, or political ideology. The purpose of liturgy is to provoke and encounter between God and the people. He writes:

A community with a sturdy sense of identity will not likely celebrate itself with poor liturgy; conversely, a community with a poor sense of self will not promote itself with any degree of confidence. A community that knows what it believes and is secure in its tradition will perform its public work with a degree of certainty that commends it to others who are looking for meaning in their lives and an opportunity to grow in their awareness of God. (*CL* p. 705.)

These are the issues that must be addressed by liturgical assemblies before liturgical revision can be successfully addressed.

In a pluralistic culture, Empereur's models of liturgical theology, Lathrop's pastoral liturgical theology (*lex agendi*), and Senn's emphasis on the cultural implications of liturgy each provide critical lenses through which we can assess the social and theological locus of a congregation. Efforts to be inclusive has broad-based support across the Church. The problem with efforts to be inclusive can be found in the fact that while many in American churches want to connect with those outside of the dominant culture, they do so without dealing with intervening historical experiences. A predominantly white parish singing African-American hymns is only *attempting* to be inclusive if it has not intentionally addressed issues of racism. A person who says "My parish welcomes lesbian and gay people," speaks only as an individual if the congregation has not intentionally addressed issues of human sexuality and homophobia. In each of these cases there is a desire for inclusivity but it is all too often the case that most of the individuals in either parish have not, cannot, and/or will not deal with the personal and institutional roots of racism or homophobia.

C. Liberating Liturgical Theology: A Feminist Perspective

Neither Lathrop's liturgical theological critique nor Senn's focus on the implication of culture on liturgy does not go far enough. While I have quoted James Empereur at length because these models, particularly the institutional, mystery,

sacramental, and proclamation models, are essential to understanding how Episcopalians may appropriate various theological positions through their interactions with the liturgy, his discussion does not mention race, gender, ethnicity, class, and/or sexual orientation. And while it is the case that each of these models can also help us to understand manifestations of the clericalism (as can result from the institutional model) that concern Countryman, Thompsett, and Dozier, and can point to ways that can free clergy and laity, both within and outside of the liturgy (as in the application of the liberation model), we must be mindful of the implications of race, gender, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation in any dialogue.

Elizabeth J. Smith addresses the liturgical implications of gender (feminist) in *Bearing fruit in Due Season: Feminist Hermeneutics and the Bible in Worship*.²⁴ Noting the paucity of women's voices in recent Anglican studies, Smith articulates a number of biases in the presentation of Anglican history and liturgy, from the predominance of clerical and male voices, to the dominance of voices from the English church, and on to the emphasis found in accounts of Christian liturgy toward texts and their famous writers and away from the users of those texts. She writes:

This bias toward texts and away from their users also makes it possible virtually to ignore the chronic disagreements about what the texts mean for theology, and how the texts ought to be realized in worship settings. Anglicanism's tensions among Evangelicals, Catholics, Charismatics, and Liberals are nowhere as evident or as unresolved as in the ways worship is understood and undertaken. Classic and contemporary Prayer Book texts conceal, in their synodically-approved uniformity, enormous variations in their diocesan and parochial implementation. (*BFDS* pp. 15-16)

²⁴ Elizabeth J. Smith, *Bearing Fruit in Due Season: Feminist Hermeneutics and the Bible in Worship*, (Collegeville 1999), hereafter referred to as *BFDS*. See also her article, *Women, Word, and Worship: Changing the treasury of Resources*, in *ATR Winter 2000 Volume 82 Number 1*, pp.113-128.

Smith proposes that the impact of liturgical forms on those who use them and not just those who create, exegete, and regulate them must be understood in the dialogue between the academy and the worshipping church.

Smith brings feminist hermeneutics to bear on the use of scripture in worship and focuses on the lectionary and sermons as the most basic liturgical forms used to regulate the liturgical use and explication of the Bible. She suggests that a lectionary whose primary use is to unify the Church or to build bridges between churches may very well fail to help those churches grapple with their own internal divisions and perpetuate the marginalization of groups within a denomination – groups like people of color, women, colonized people, or gay and lesbian Christians.²⁵ A feminist critique of the lectionary asks how far the viewpoints and needs of women, people of color, and/or gays and lesbians have been recognized and addressed.

Such a critique can be applied to the six functions of lectionaries²⁶ suggested by Horace T. Allen, one of the developers of the *Common Lectionary* and *Revised Common Lectionary*, here expanded to include other marginalized groups:

- ❑ *Full and Catechetical Function*: How much attention is being paid to women, people of color, and gays and lesbians who are numerous among those to be catechized? How much biblical material pertaining to these groups is omitted or glossed over despite the lectionary's claim to fullness of biblical coverage?
- ❑ *Preaching Function*: How does the lectionary present negative texts about these groups in combinations that encourage or require

²⁵ Smith, *BFDS*, pp. 80-81.

²⁶ Horace T. Allen, "Lectionaries – Principles and Problems: A Comparative Analysis," *Studia Liturgica* 22 (1992), pp. 84-99, quoted and adapted by Smith, p. 82.

preachers to deal with the Bible's capacity to oppress women, people of color, and gays and lesbians?

- ❑ *Feasts, Festivals, and Seasons Function*: How can the active role of women, people of color, and gays and lesbians in salvation history be better represented in the liturgical calendar?
- ❑ *Cultural, Climatic, Seasonal, and Ethnic Function*: How do the cultures and rhythms of these groups' working, domestic, and physical lives find expression in the calendar and the lections that flow from it?
- ❑ *Liturgical and Doxological Function*: How are these groups' praise enhanced, and how are their pastoral needs acknowledged by the use of Scripture?
- ❑ *Historical and Ecumenical Witness Function*: How much honor should there be given to so-called historical traditions that omit the histories and experiences of these groups, and the so-called ecumenical solidarity between traditions that seeks to drown out these voices?

In answering these questions we must be aware of the liturgical purposes of the lectionary. Deletion of some or all of the oppressive or difficult passages for liturgical purposes runs the risk of constructing and reinforcing the image of the Bible as a universally positive, helpful, and salvific document.

Smith also offers a series of observations about the role and possible functions of lectionaries that are responsive to the concerns raised by feminist hermeneutics, here again expanded to include other marginalized groups:

- ❑ A lectionary must provide *ample* Scripture for the worshipping community: The Bible is a large and extremely diverse collections of writings, and a lectionary is not doing its job unless it confronts worshippers with the scope and diversity of material that the Church calls

the Word of God. A lectionary that ignores or glosses over passages that are oppressive and/or difficult does a disservice to all people in the worshipping community.

❑ A lectionary must provide *manageable* Scripture for the worshipping community: Scripture administered in unwieldy combination and indigestible quantities is not the best way to enable worshippers to hear the Word of God. Manageable Scripture means that passages that are oppressive are combined with passages proclaiming the full humanity of marginalized people, and encourages interpretation for the liberation of women, people of color, and gay and lesbian people.

❑ A lectionary must deliver Scripture into a *context*: Lectionaries do not offer Scripture for Scripture's sake; rather, it offers Scripture for the community's sake and for the sake of its prayer in specific contexts. A lectionary pays attention to context in the way it handles the Church year, the educational dynamic in a community, the recurrent pastoral issues in the community's existence, and the Church's role both in speaking prophetically and hearing prophetic voices within and outside of the Church's boundaries.

Smith is quick to point out that Scripture in context can be highly problematic because the Bible is called upon to “bear witness to God’s word in contexts about which the biblical authors knew nothing, and on which they never imagined that their writings might be asked to rule.”²⁷ Issues such as ordination, domestic violence, hate crimes, and civil rights need to be embraced in liturgy, but the Bible is silent, or speaks only obliquely, about these and others issues of concern to women, people of color, and gay and lesbian individuals.

Finally, Smith concludes with descriptions of what lectionaries cannot do: First, they cannot make worshippers and preachers interpret Scripture in transforming ways.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

Second, while lectionaries lay a foundation for the liturgical stage of biblical interpretation, they cannot force a worshipping community to build on that foundation. Third, lectionaries that are informed by feminist and liberation hermeneutics will not automatically generate interpretations and theological views that affirm and empower marginalized people. Communities must be open to the possibilities of transformation.

This feminist hermeneutic has wide ranging implications for other marginalized groups. Everything that feminists have learned about biblical hermeneutics over the last thirty years will help the Church to learn more about such issues as racism, classism, and gay and lesbian sexuality in the years ahead. It also raises up issues of quality and accountability in the liturgical process. How do we know what is good, and how do we recognize that something is not good, without adding to someone else's burden of oppression? Smith offers four areas of accountability and raises some important questions:²⁸

□ We are accountable to the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What we say in our liturgies must be true. One strength of Prayer Books is that dozens, even hundreds of people have checked and rechecked the texts for truth. Whose judgement will [we] trust for the truth of [our] words, and how will [we] seek that judgement, when [we] create new texts beyond the Prayer Book? Will [we] rely on [our] seminary lecture notes, or will [we] meet often and argumentatively with other searchers for theological and spiritual truth, risking [our] perceptions and formulations in robust engagement with them?

□ We are accountable to the Creator of all beauty and strength. Yes, God chooses what is low and despised in the world to shame the powerful, but the saint who wrote that had an extraordinary command of language

²⁸ Smith, *Women, Word, and Worship*, pp. 125-126. I have changed the author's first person singular to first person plural.

and used it to the full to get his message across. A wonderful message only ever heard in pedestrian language will rarely have its virtues recognised. An eternal message spoken in unmemorable language will soon be forgotten, What will [we] do to hone [our] communication skills, when [we] create new texts beyond the Prayer Book? Will [we] merely write copiously, filling notebooks with inspired ramblings, or will [we] also read widely fiction, poetry, criticism? Will [we] then sweat over [our] notebooks in revision after revision, keeping a large wastepaper bin for the work that fails to measure up?

□ We are accountable to the Holy Spirit who gives gifts to individuals for the sake of the community. Another strength of Prayer Books has been that their texts are generally unattributed to particular authors. How will [we] acknowledge that the community's spiritual identity is larger than [our] own, when [we] create new texts beyond the Prayer Books? Will [we] remain closely identified with [our] texts, or will [we] let them loose, to go where they can be improved – or ignored – by people who do not know [us] or the good intentions and hard work [we] put into their initial creation?

□ And we are accountable, particularly if we are among the ordained, who have enormous power to enable or disallow liturgical speech, we are accountable to the unfolding, evolving blossoming tradition of the faith community. As designated tradition-bearers, we share the responsibility for helping local communities find and use their voices in prayer over time. Will [we] superimpose [our] own voice[s] (or the voices of the anthologies of liturgical material adorning the bookcases in our stud[ies]) on the community which existed long before [we] arrived and which will be praying together long after [we] leave? Or will [we] tune our ear[s] to hear the cadences of the community's faith-speech, then tune [our] own tongue[s] and pen to echo and extend what [we] hear, searching out the community members who already speak beautifully in their native tongue and encouraging them to write as well?

□ *If we are willing to be held accountable these ways, the liturgical speech of our praying communities will flourish. If we are not thus accountable, then all our creativity is self-indulgence at worst and self-development at best, and not a genuine contribution to the treasury of common prayer.*²⁹

²⁹ Italics mine.

These accountabilities should go a long way toward the development of a liturgical theology that is inclusive of race, gender, ethnicity, class, and sexual identity.

D. Dialogue Through Liturgy

In *The Bush Was Blazing But Was Not Consumed*, Law explores the dynamics of multicultural leadership and how to develop multicultural community through liturgy. I want to look at his work in some detail because many elements of his analysis intersect significantly with Countryman's critique and Thompson's guidelines for engaging in controversial dialogue. Where Countryman paints in broad brush-strokes his critique of ordained and lay priesthood, and Thompson works in finer detail about how the Episcopal Church has and can deal with difficult issues, Law, offers specific guidelines for how Christian communities can become multiculturally inclusive. Like Dozier, Law offers theological analysis and study guidelines rooted in scripture and offering an invitation to God to transform us. I believe that these guidelines can be appropriated into the context of the liturgical, theological, and dialogical process that I am proposing.

Illustrating the kinds of problems that hinder dialogue and the development of relationships, Law tells the story of how he was invited to speak at a conference in which he was going to address the power dynamics between African-Americans and European Americans. Just prior to the event, the O.J Simpson verdict was announced. After observing reactions about the outcome of the trial, he was worried that these emotions would have a polarizing effect on the conference. He writes:

Upon arrival at the airport, an African American women met me. . . After the usual introduction, she confronted me, 'So, what do you think? Is he guilty or not.'

I wanted to discuss with her my reaction to the verdict, but this was not the time or place to do it. But her question hung in the air in front of

me; what I saw was that our relationship, which had hardly begun, seemed to depend entirely on my answer to this question. What would her reaction be? If I said I didn't believe he was guilty, we would just have a pleasant conversation about how we were on the winning side. If I said I felt he was guilty, my supper and ride to the conference would be accompanied by more proofs of his innocence while my credibility as the speaker at the conference would be conditioned by her review of my 'performance'. . . My instinct said, 'Avoid it. Walk away.' [After struggling with the implications of whether or not to deal with her question] I said, 'Do you want an honest answer?'

'Of course,' she said.

'I could tell you what you want to hear and then we can have a superficial friendship or I could tell you what I really felt, which would mean that I need you to promise to maintain a dialogue with me.'

'What do you mean?'

'No matter what I say, I need to know that you and I will continue to listen to each other's points of view or I will not want to continue any further.'

'Okay.'

'At the time the verdict was announced, my immediate reaction was that he was guilty and had gotten off. But. . .' I hesitated a little; she interrupted.

'How can you think he was guilty? The gloves didn't fit! They had never. . .'

'Wait a minute!' I interrupted her this time. 'This is exactly what I didn't want to do. You promised that you would maintain a dialogue with me, not to prove that you were right and I was wrong. . . I need you to listen to me until I am finished and then I will invite you to do the same.'³⁰

Law concludes that once they had agreed to listen to one another and had dispensed with judgmental, win/lose mind-sets and embraced a both/and non-judgmental state of mind, they were able to be in true dialogue with one another.

The first half of the story is illustrative of the kinds of conversations that happen in the Church more often than not; the second half of this story shows us the foundation of how we must engage in conversation if we are to find holy and common ground where

³⁰ *TBWBBNC*, pp. 22-24.

we can find God. Law posits that dialogue is a deliberate act that can be considered a liturgy. He draws parallels between the deliberate and intentional acts of the eucharist with those required in viable dialogue.

In Chapter 12, '*Dialogue as Liturgy*, Law examines three elements of liturgy that are important to the dialogue process: the form-centered style of leadership, liturgy as reenactment, and liturgy as God-centered.

Acknowledging the importance of liturgy in the life of Episcopalians, Law writes that while the content of each liturgy may be different in terms of hymns, scriptural readings, and sermons, the *form* of the liturgy remains the same. Form is recognized and upheld by the community and when an individual leader strays from this form, the community is well aware of the fact. Thus, the liturgy employs form-centered leadership in which the form itself is the leader, not the individual presiding over the liturgy.³¹ This understanding allowed Law to see that dialogue can best be facilitated if it is understood as liturgy. This is particularly important in the facilitation of dialogue, especially when a particular dialogue may happen in different places with different facilitators.

Not unlike liturgy, which is *reenacted* week in and week out in the Episcopal Church, dialogue is not a one time event. Law uses the analogy of liturgies found in the *Book of Common Prayer*:

Liturgies like the Holy Eucharist, Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Compline are the most-used services in the Episcopal Church. They are repeated again every week – if not every day in some communities – with a variation in the choice of hymns, scripture readings, and preaching. A good liturgy maintains the form, but allows great flexibility for the content

³¹ Law, *TBWBBNC*, pp. 113-114.

to change. People do not seem to get tired of these forms, nor do they say, 'I did the Eucharist once and that's all I need. I am in communion with God forever. I don't need it again.' If we treat dialogue as liturgy, we begin to see the value of repeated experiences of dialogue. Each time we do it, we learn more and gain more insights.³²

Communities need to reenact the dialogue process regularly and, like liturgy, need to be repeated and modified over time according to the needs of the community.

Effective dialogue will be enhanced when it, like the liturgy, is *God-centered*. In this context, dialogue can become prophetic. When the dialogue process becomes liturgy, we build a context not only with each other but also with God. In this process, we can begin to see that our different cultural contexts are only relative to each other. 'When the dialogue process becomes liturgy, we have the potential to move the participants beyond mutual understanding and toward reconciliation, and communion with each other and with God.'³³

Law follows this conversation with his chapter entitled '*Liturgy as Dialogue*,' where he explains how liturgy can nurture and support community through the dialogue process. Reminding the reader that liturgy can never be used as a 'perfume' to cover up the real issues of our lives and should never be self-serving in ways that make us feel better and more secure while excluding anyone who does not know our style of worship, he writes:

In order to create multicultural liturgy that does not exclude, liturgy needs the help of the dialogue process in two ways. First, liturgy needs the intercultural dialogue process to move between high- and low-context

³² Law, *TBWBBNC*, pp. 114-115.

³³ Law, *TBWBBNC*, p. 117.

levels of participation. Second, liturgy needs the intercultural dialogue process to be prophetic.³⁴

Where high-context cultures value the collectiveness of the community, low-context cultures tend to be highly individualized. The more context we share in a system (high-context), the more stability we have; the less context we share (low-context), the more changes can occur in the system. 'In other words, when we need to adapt and change, we have to move toward a low-context style of relating. . . [and] when there is a need of stability, we tend to move toward a high-context style of relating because the tradition is established.' When tradition becomes implicit, the less likely it is to be changed.

Episcopal Church liturgies tend to be high-context and, hence, exclusionary or inaccessible. We cannot assume that all members of the community have a shared context. Low-context elements of the liturgy, such as the liturgy of the word and the sermon, can provide opportunities for a shared context for the members of the community. Law argues that if we incorporate the dialogue process in the liturgy by inviting different cultural groups into our midst and listen to one another's voices, we acknowledge God as our common ground. Liturgy in this context clearly moves away from the institutional model enters the liberation model discussed by Empereur. Law closes with a general introduction of the elements of multicultural liturgy and then outlines a service complete with opening prayer, a 'litany for dialogue,' and a list of suggested lessons. He then segues into a workshop outline for a biblical reflection

³⁴ Law, *TBWBBNC*, p. 120.

process and guidelines for dialogue before returning to a format for the prayers of the people, the peace, eucharist, prayer of thanksgiving, and dismissal.

Law's multicultural and dialogical analysis lends itself well to some of the concerns raised by Countryman, Thompsett, and Dozier even though he does not explicitly discuss clericalism and the role of the laity *per se* and they do not explicitly deal with multiculturalism or sexual identity. Many elements of his analysis and his guidelines for dialogue can be applied toward the realization of the renewal of the priesthood of all; they can be used to help us learn how to live with our history; and they can be a call to return to dialogue with one another and with God. His emphasis on liturgy and the importance of liturgical acts in the life and faith of the community puts flesh on the bones of Empereur's discussion of the models of liturgical theology.

Liturgy is the center of a community. It holds community together. When we commit ourselves to the dream of God, liturgy must be at the center. Our liturgy must become a dialogue process that calls people toward holy and common ground. Liturgy is where we are fed and nurtured. Liturgy is where we are challenged. Liturgy is where we are called to be reconciled to Christ and to one another. It is where we are comforted. It is where we are transformed.

CHAPTER III

A. Liturgy of the Word and the Lectionary

How can we be transformed if we do not hear the scriptures pertaining to the contentious and difficult issues in the Church today? How can we be expected to reflect theologically on the significant issues and concerns of the Church? Dozier is fierce when it comes to engaging the word, as is Thompsett in *We Are Theologians*. Why not use scripture appropriate to a topic that may need to be addressed? Why not develop sets of scriptural texts suitable for a topical lectionary on such issues as human sexuality, racism, classism, and sexism? Why not hear these lessons in the context of worship?

The Lectionary of the *Book of Common Prayer* is arranged in a three-year cycle for Sundays and a two-year cycle for the daily office and provides for the reading of a substantial amount of the Hebrew Scriptures and almost all of the New Testament over the Sundays of the church year; the daily office lectionary allows for reading through the former once and the latter twice during the course of two years. The readings for Holy Eucharist, Sundays, and major Holy Days follow the pattern of Hebrew Scripture, Psalm, Epistle, and Gospel, as proscribed in the Lectionary, and there is generally some thematic unity tying the lessons together. During particular seasons of the church year these readings tend to show even more unity. While it is the case that the rubrics require the use of the Lectionary readings for all Sunday services, one of the two lessons that precede the Gospel can be omitted and the psalm is not obligatory. This allows for a great deal of

flexibility in shaping the lessons to fit the needs of the community. Conversely, this flexibility can result in the omission of scriptural passages that deal with key issues facing the Church today.

Despite this flexibility and the scope of the scripture used in the lectionary, there are many passages from the Bible that are not read during the course of the three-year lectionary or are only found in the Daily Office. These omissions can result in the lack of opportunity to hear and digest important passages that are commonly used in such conversations as human sexuality or racism. If we do not hear these lessons, how can we formulate our theological understanding of what God is calling us to do or believe? If we do not have the opportunity to reflect theologically on scriptural passages that shape and inform what we are called to do and believe, how can we make informed decisions? The decisions about the lectionary have been made by the institution³⁵ and yet decisions about what is used can be made, to some degree, by bishops and presbyters under the rubrics of the *BCP*. Thus, by decree and/or desire, the people of God can be deprived of hearing significant passages from the Word of God. Countryman is quite clear about the implications of what can happen when the laity is cut off from theological dialogue and may start theologizing from scratch: the construction of new, makeshift, and often clumsy theologies that sometimes become tradition.³⁶

³⁵ Article X, *Constitution & Canons For the Government of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America Otherwise Known as the Episcopal Church Together with the Rules of Order Adopted in General Convention 1789-1997 Revised by the 1997 Convention*. Hereafter referred to as *Constitution & Canons*.

³⁶ Countryman, *Living on the Border of the Holy*, pp. 90-91.

B. Sermons

Each worship service³⁷ of the *BCP* requires the reading of scripture and provides rubrics for some form of sermon or homily. The exposition of the lections just read was regular part of the Eucharist in the early centuries. The practice became less regular through the late Middle Ages; sometimes sermons were read no more than one to four times each year. The Reformation brought about the resurgence in the practice of sermonizing, and sermons or homilies have been required in the Eucharist services in every Anglican prayer book since 1549. The purpose of the sermon is to relate the lessons, and particularly the Gospels, to the needs and concerns of the congregation.

Strict adherence to the lectionary cycles and traditional preaching styles can result in congregations never hearing sermons about contemporary issues in a timely manner. While creative and thoughtful homilists can imaginatively extract meaningful relationships between the Word and our everyday lives, most congregation will hear thoughtful and safe reflections on the texts. Preachers and people will tend to remain in the safe harbor of their high-context level of participation unless otherwise given opportunities that equip them to venture out into the weather.

I think that a good example of this can be found in examining the lessons for the Second Sunday after Epiphany Year B and the celebration of Martin Luther King Day, specifically I Samuel 3:1-10 (11-20), Psalm 63:1-8, I Corinthians 6:11b-20, John 1:43-51 as the lessons for Sunday 16 January. The passage from Samuel deals with the prophet's

³⁷ With the exception of Compline.

recognition of his call from God after Eli admonishes him to listen ('Speak, Lord, your servant is listening'). A common explication of this passage would be to note that God finds us and calls us in particular moments in history and that we should be open to God's call to us. The psalm voices a longing to be in God's presence; it can be seen as a reminder to be open to and to eagerly seek God. The epistle is part of Paul's response to the Corinthians' belief that freedom from the law meant license to do as they pleased. The apostle admonishes them to remember that their bodies were 'not meant for fornication but for the Lord,' and that they are members of the body of Christ. In the gospel reading from John we are told the story of the calling of Philip and Nathanael; here we are shown how one person's testimony brings another to Jesus.

These lessons are a preacher's delight. It would be easy to write a sermon that links calling (Samuel), longing and praise (the psalm), the significance of being members of the body of Christ (Corinthians), and our responsibility to bring others to the knowledge of Jesus (the gospel). These are important messages to any Christian community. Exegetical opportunities abound with these passages. Good preachers will link the call of Samuel to those of other prophets such as Isaiah and Amos right on down the line to Jesus; they will explicate and make comparisons to how the prophets' struggle to listen to and acknowledge God's call is not unlike our own trials and tribulations of discernment. They will very likely link this calling to a call for fidelity in all of our relations as members of the body of Christ. Finally, these lessons will be linked to the gospel that asks us to 'Come and see.' Across the board, most Episcopalians are going to hear some pretty good sermons on this Sunday.

I am willing to bet that many of these sermons about calling and Christian responsibility will be linked in ways major and minor to the celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King, whose holiday is celebrated near 2 Epiphany. Dr. King's life exemplifies calling, faith, and Christian responsibility. But how many preachers would be lifting up Dr. King if his feast day and national holiday did not coincide with these lessons? For that matter, from how many pulpits will be heard anything about Martin Luther King? In parishes where the high-context mode is operational, little is likely to be heard; in places where the low-context mode predominates, more will be heard.

These lessons and the congruence of Martin Luther King Day provide an excellent opportunity to discuss racism both historically and contemporaneously in American society. Coincidentally, the reading from I Corinthians is one of the few passages commonly used by those on both sides of the human sexuality issue that actually appears in the Lectionary for both Sundays and the Daily Office. What a golden opportunity for a parish to begin to consider the manifestations of racism or to develop a theology of sexuality. The only problem is that these lessons stand alone in the weeks and months ahead. Even if a preacher decided to deeply engage these passages, there would be no opportunities in the near future to continue to engage the issues. There are too many gaps and omissions under the present lectionary system to be able to regularly and intentionally engage problems and concerns. We need more flexibility and more opportunities for the critical engagement of scripture. To that end, I offer this liturgical, theological, and dialogical suggestion: *The creation of topical lectionaries on various subjects that would allow a parish to critically engage scripture over a period of time*

and the facilitation of discussions following the liturgy using guidelines informed by
Thompsett, Dozier, and Law.

C. Proposed Lectionary: Homosexuality and Same-sex Unions

Neither the current prayer book lectionary nor the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) contain more than two or three of the passages commonly used in the debates about homosexuality and same-sex unions. In this section, we will provide suggestions for a topical lectionary whose passages are 1) derived from current scholarship on both sides of the debate about homosexuality and same-sex unions, and are 2) derived from the lessons commonly used at the Celebration and Blessing of Holy Matrimony as provided in the *Book of Common Prayer*. Further, we will provide a brief commentary on each reading and suggest groups of readings for use in each liturgy. For the sake of clarity in presentation, these commentaries will be based primarily on the works of L. William Countryman, particularly his 1988 book, *Dirt Greed and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today*, and Stanley J. Grenz, particularly his 1998 book, *Welcoming But Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality*, as well as commentaries from *The New Interpreter's Bible*, *Interpretation*, and the *Westminster Bible Companion*.

Hebrew Scripture – Sexuality and Sexual Morality

Genesis 19 – The Story of Sodom

Leviticus 18:22 – Purity Codes

Leviticus 20:13 – Purity Codes

Judges 19 – The Story of Gibeah

New Testament Epistles – Sexuality and Sexual Morality

Romans 1:26-27 – Dishonorable Passions

I Corinthians 6:9-11 – Sexual Perversions

I Timothy 1:10 – The Lawless and the Ungodly

Hebrew Scripture – Marriage, Love, and Covenant (BCP)

Genesis 1:26-28 – Male and female he created them

Genesis 2: 4-9 and 15-24 – A man cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh

Song of Solomon 2:10-13 and 8:6-7 – Many waters cannot quench love

Apocrypha – Marriage, Love, and Covenant (BCP)

Tobit 8:5b-8 – That we may grow old together

New Testament Epistles – Marriage, Love, and Covenant (BCP)

I Corinthians 13:1-13 – Love is patient and kind

Ephesians 3:14-19 – The Father from whom every family is named

Ephesians 5:1-2 and 21-33 – Walk in love as Christ loved us

Colossians 3:12-17 – Love which binds everything together in harmony

1 John 4:7-16 – Let us love one another for love is of God

New Testament Gospels – Marriage, Love, and Covenant (BCP)

Matthew 5:1-10 – The Beatitudes

Matthew 5:13-16 – You are the light. . . let your light so shine

Matthew 7:21, and 24-29 – Like a wise man who built his house upon a rock

Mark 10:6-9 and 13-16 – There are no longer two but one

John 15:9-12 – Love one another as I have loved you

1. Scripture, Sexuality, and Sexual Morality

Genesis 19 and Judges 19

Neither Genesis 19 nor Judges 19 appear in the Sunday Lectionary or the Revised Common Lectionary in years A, B, or C. Both passages are commonly cited among the reasons why scripture condemns homosexuality by those who oppose same-sex unions in particular and homosexuality in general.

These two stories share a common plot. A dweller in a city, Lot in Sodom and an ‘old man’ in Gibeah, offers hospitality to visitors who appear late in the day and have no place to stay. Shortly thereafter, some ‘men of the city’ approach and demand that the hosts ‘bring out’ the visitor(s) ‘that we may know [him/them]’ (Gen. 19:5; Judg. 19:22³⁸). In both stories, the host goes to extremes to defend his guest(s) from danger; in the Sodom story the makes an offer to the men of the city to take his virgin daughter instead (Gen. 19:7-8); in the Judges account, the visitor’s concubine is offered as well (vs. 24). In the Genesis story, the offer is refused and divine intervention saves the visitors, while the account in Judges, the concubine is raped and killed by the attackers and then divided into twelve pieces by her master. Both stories end with the destruction of the cities – Sodom is destroyed by God (Gen. 19:24) and Gibeah is ‘put to the sword’ in a battle between the Israelites and the Benjaminites (Judg. 20:37).

³⁸ Judges 19:23 uses the phrase ‘have intercourse with him.’

Biblical scholars have offered two interpretations of these texts. While most agree that these passages do contain references to homosexual rape, they disagree as to whether or not these texts are a condemnation of genital homosexual acts. Traditional interpretation among some Christian exegetes emphasize that the attempted homosexual rapes is a condemnation of homosexual genital acts.³⁹ Contemporary interpretations among some Christian scholars emphasize that these texts are about violations of the purity codes and not a condemnation of homosexual acts as such.⁴⁰ Where traditional interpretations eschew the argument that the sin of inhospitality by the citizens of Sodom and Gibeah was the primary emphasis of the Genesis and Judges passages, *The New Interpreter's Bible*⁴¹ notes that *hospitality* should not be narrowly conceived. In comparing Lot's actions to those of Abraham, the authors note:

Hospitality involves a wide-ranging image, revealing fundamental relationships of well-being for individuals and society. Abraham shows hospitality in exemplary fashion. Lot follows suit to some extent, but he fails at a key juncture. The people of Sodom show no sign of what hospitality entails at all.

It seems wise not to overdraw the differences between Abraham's hospitality in [Genesis] 18:1-8 and Lot's in [Genesis] 19:1-3. Initially Lot's hospitality parallels Abraham's; thus when the differences appear, they have a greater shock value. Lot does engage the crowd on behalf of his guests, and he names directly the sin of the Sodomites ['I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly' [vs. 7]. At the same time, his language to them as 'brothers' raises problems, and his treatment of his daughters reveals deep levels of inhospitality. (*NIB* Vol. 1 pp.473-474)

³⁹ Stanley J. Grenz, *Welcoming But Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality*, (Louisville 1998), pp. 35-36.

⁴⁰ L. William Countryman, *Dirt Greed and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today*, (Philadelphia 1988), pp. 30-31.

⁴¹ *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes, Volumes I and II* (Nashville 1994,1998) Hereafter referred to as *NIB*.

In addition to calling Lot's actions into question, the authors of the *NIB* also raise up the actions of the old man and his Levite guest. In an "act of twisted male hospitality," the old man offers his virgin daughters and the Levite's concubine; the Levite suddenly intervenes and, "seized his concubine, and put her out to them" (Judg. 19:25), and gives her up as a "dispensable victim and a substitute sacrifice who undergoes the horror and abuse he would have experienced" (*NIB* Vol. 2 p. 877).

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

Neither of these passages appear in the Sunday Lectionary or Revised Common Lectionary for years A, B, or C. Both of these passages are commonly cited as further evidence that scripture condemns homosexuality.

These passages are from the section of Leviticus commonly called the Holiness or Purity codes. The eighteenth chapter of Leviticus begins with God admonishing Moses and the people of Israel not "to do as they do in the land of Canaan. . . you shall not follow their statutes" (vs. 3) and goes on to describe the ordinances against such sexual behaviors as incest, intercourse with kin, and sexual relations with women during menses. The pericope in question, "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman, it is an abomination" (vs. 22), is preceded by the command not to sacrifice children to Molech and followed by the command against bestiality. Leviticus 20 begins with God specifying punishments to those who disobey the commandments against pagan worship and continues with a list of punishments to those who sin against the family. The pericope in

question, “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death” (vs. 13), is preceded by the command against a man lying with his daughter-in-law and followed by the command against a man having intercourse with the mother of his wife.

Traditional exegetes contend that sexual propriety precludes homosexual behavior, while contemporary exegetes believe that the Levitical prohibitions do not condemn homosexuality as we know it today. The former posit that the biblical records of both Hebrew Scripture and the New Testament condemn homosexuality as contrary to the created order of male and female and represent a defense of married life and family.⁴² The latter contend that the ancient world did not have a word or concept for ‘homosexuality’ as it is understood today and that the prohibitions are culturally conditioned and specific to the time in history that they were written.⁴³ The *NIB* notes that “many would argue that this reflects limited Israelite understandings and social context (similar to attitudes on women and slaves) and texts like Lev. 18:22 are not to be considered eternally binding,” and further admonishes that these issues cannot be resolved in the discussion of these texts alone.⁴⁴

⁴² Grenz, *op.cit.* pp. 45-46. See also Richard B. Hays, “Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies: The Witness of Scripture Concerning Homosexuality,” p.10, in Jeffrey S. Siker, ed. *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate*, (Louisville 1994), pp. 3-17.

⁴³ Countryman, *Dirt Greed and Sex*, *op.cit.* p. 39. See also Victor Paul Furnish, “The Bible and Homosexuality: Reading the Texts in Context,” pp. 30-31, in Siker, *op.cit.*, pp. 18-35.

⁴⁴ *NIB*, Vol. 2, p. 1127.

Romans 1:26-27

This passage is not found in the Sunday Lectionary nor in the Revised Common Lectionary for years A, B, or C. Romans 1:26-27 is the most often cited passage in the current debate around homosexuality. This pericope must be read in the greater context of vss. 18-32.

In vss. 18-23, Paul speaks of God's wrath being revealed against the ungodliness and wickedness of those who exchanged the glory of God "for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles." Because of this "God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (vss 24-25). Paul continues:

For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error (vss. 26-27).

He concludes with a list of their transgressions, noting that they were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice, envy, murder strife, deceit, and craftiness. They were gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Traditional Christian exegetes find in these verses "a clear New Testament confirmation and expansion to females of the prohibition of male-to-male intercourse

articulated in the Holiness Code.” They claim that in this passage Paul forthrightly declares that all forms of same-sex genital behavior is immoral.⁴⁵ Contemporary Christian exegetes posit that Paul was referring to idolatrous practices such as temple or cult prostitution that was common among the Romans of his day and that he condemning all Gentile practices that were anathema to Jewish purity codes.⁴⁶ They note that the kinds of same-sex genital activity known to Paul – cult prostitution, pederasty, as well the ancient disgust that surrounds the notion of any male assuming a subservient (passive female) sexual role or a female assuming a superior (aggressive male) sexual role – were particular to his time and not our contemporary society.⁴⁷

The author of the Romans commentary in the *Westminster Bible Companion* posits that Paul’s fundamental claim in Romans is not a claim about sexual behavior, but a claim about right worship. As to sexual behavior:

It is not altogether evident just what kinds of behavior Paul here condemns. . . No doubt Paul knew exactly what he was writing about. We do not. . . Paul seems to have little sense that homosexuality may be more a deep-seated orientation than a set of individual choices. We know some things about homosexuality that Paul did not know. He reads his time in the light of the best wisdom available. We are called to read our time in the light of the best wisdom available to us.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Grenz, *op.cit.*, p. 48.

⁴⁶ Countryman, *op.cit.*, p. 109-113. See also Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debate*, (Philadelphia 1983), pp. 115-118.

⁴⁷ Countryman, *op.cit.*, pp. 114-117. See also Patrick D. Miller, “What the Scriptures Principally Teach,” p. 55, in Choon-Leong Seow, ed., *Homosexuality and Christian Community*, (Louisville 1996), pp. 53-63.

⁴⁸ David L. Bartlett, *Romans*, Westminster Bible Companion, (Louisville 1995), p. 31.

Romans 1 should not be read apart from the larger context of the entire epistle, nor apart from the larger context of Paul’s epistles, nor apart from the larger counsel of the New Testament – or apart from tradition, reason, and experience.

*I Corinthians 6:9-11*⁴⁹

This passage from I Corinthians does not appear in the Sunday Lectionary or in the Revised Common Lectionary and is one of the most often quoted verses from the New Testament as regards the condemnation of homosexual relations. It is also one of the most controversial in terms of the scholarly debate over the use of terminology and translation from the original Greek and their meanings in various Greek. A survey of this passage in any number of available translations shows different terms used to describe the original Greek words *malakos* and *arsenokoites*, the two terms that receive the most scrutiny. The following chart will help to illustrate this point:

	<u><i>Malakos</i></u>	<u><i>Arsenokoites</i></u>
KJV	catamites	abusers of self with mankind
NIV	male prostitutes	homosexual offenders
NEB	x	homosexual perversion
REB	x	sexual perverts
RSV	x	sexual perverts
NRSV	male prostitutes	sodomites
NAB	boy prostitutes	practicing homosexuals

⁴⁹ The Greek terms discussed here have been transliterated from the Greek New Testament. I have compared them to terms found in *A Lexicon, Abridged from Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English*

Note that neither the New English Bible (NEB) nor the Revised Standard Version (RSV) nor the Revised English Bible (REB) use a translation of *malakos*.

A general survey of Greek literature written before, during, and after the time that I Corinthians was written sheds illuminating light on the ancient understanding and usage of these terms. While *malakos* has acquired the meaning of “morally weak” (Liddell and Scott), its New Testament use seems to apply only to “catamites,” a term used to refer to men and boys who allowed themselves to be misused homosexually. In first-century Hellenized Palestine such “misuse” more often than not referred to sexual acts performed during pagan ritual acts. Thus, *malakos* is not explicitly a term used to describe homosexual behavior.

Arsenokoites does not appear in any Greek literature written before Paul. It appears that this term originated in Hellenistic Judaism as the Greek translation of the Hebrew *mishav zakur*, which means “lying with a male.” Other Greek uses of the term *arsenokoites* refer to pederasts and sodomites. Traditional scholars interpret this to mean any form of male-on-male sexual activity and extend its meaning to apply to all same-sex relationship as we understand them today.⁵⁰ Contemporary scholars have suggested that these terms are possible references to the practice of homosexual prostitution, in which the younger partner – the *malakos* – is exploited by the *arsenokoites*; they emphasize the contextual differences between Paul’s time and ours.⁵¹

Lexicon, (Oxford 1987) and Walter Bauer, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Christian Literature*, (Chicago 1957, 1979).

⁵⁰ Grenz, *op.cit.*, p. 59.

⁵¹ Countryman, *op.cit.*, pp. 117-118.

I Timothy 1:8-10

This pericope does not appear in either the Sunday Lectionary or the Revised Common Lectionary.

This passage, intimately linked to the passage from I Corinthians, refers to the belief that the law was written for the lawless. Here, the list of the lawless includes *pornois* (immoral persons, fornicators, those who practice sexual perversion), *arsenokoitais* (as we have seen, these are the pederasts, etc.), and *andrapodistais* (slave traders). It appears that this passage not only condemns those who practice such acts, but seems to be referring to those who willingly abuse themselves and others.

As is the case with the other passages we have reviewed, there is a diversity of opinion between traditional and contemporary exegetes; their diverse opinions have been discussed in detail above. The *Interpretation* commentary notes that for Paul the law was given to “guide and constrain all those who would transgress relationships of covenant sexual fidelity.”⁵²

2 Peter 2:6 and Jude 7

Neither of these passages appear in the Sunday Lectionary or the Revised Common Lectionary. Exegesis of these verses depends upon one’s reading of Genesis 19. See the commentaries on Genesis 19 and Judges 19 above.

2. Scripture, Love, Marriage, and Covenant

Most of the lessons about marriage, love, and covenant listed above are found in the Sunday Lectionary and the Revised Common Lectionary, as well as in the lections for the Celebration and Blessing of Holy Matrimony in the *Book of Common Prayer*. The passages from Genesis 1:26-28, Genesis 2:4-9, 15-24, and Ephesians 5:21-33 are often cited by scholars in conversation about homosexuality and same-sex unions. We will limit our commentary in this section to these three passages.

Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:4-9, 15-24

These verses contain two versions of the Creation. The first (1:26-28) is rather ambiguous about the roles of men and women, saying only that “God created humankind in his image. . . male and female he created them.” The second account is more specific: Man was created to tend the Garden of Eden (2:15); then, after creating the animal kingdom and finding its members to be insufficient partners for man, God created woman from man’s rib “and brought her to the man” (2:22). This second version was long employed to show the ascendancy of men over women, emphasizing women’s inferiority to men and denying women full participation in the Church – as in the case of ordination until 1976. It is in this second version of the Creation that the ancient Hebrews explicated

⁵² Thomas C. Oden, *First and Second Timothy and Titus, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching*, (Louisville 1989), pp. 39-40.

their understanding about sexual relations: women and men were capable of producing children from the sexual act.

Scholars engaged in the debates about homosexuality and same-sex unions generally acknowledge the importance of the Creation stories in the discussions, but differ as to the significance. Traditional exegetes “maintain that the union of male and female depicted in the Genesis accounts is designed to offer the only God-given model for human sexual relationships.”⁵³ They believe that heterosexual marriage is the standard by which all human sexual expression is to be judged. Contemporary exegetes approach these texts from the perspective that these stories must be understood in the context of the narrator’s concern to provide a rationale for the importance of procreation and understanding the created order. Because these texts were written in a social context different from our own, they should not be read as prescribing or proscribing what is true for us today.⁵⁴ Sexuality implies companionship, sharing of tasks, the enjoyment of each other and the environment.

Sexuality as companionship, as the sharing of tasks, as the enjoying together of the fruits of our labors and of each other, fits easily into contemporary society. In many families these dynamics of relationships take precedence over procreation. Few people today, for instance, would argue that childless couples share an ‘unnatural’ relationship. What are our reasons for insisting that in all families the partners must be of opposite

⁵³ Grenz, *op.cit.*, p. 102.

⁵⁴ See John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*, (Chicago 1980), pp. 31-34; Furnish, *op.cit.*, pp.21-23; and Richard E. Whitaker, “Creation and Human Sexuality,” pp. 10-12, in Seow, *op.cit.*, pp. 3-13.

sexes? If we accept and endorse homosexual couples living in loving, monogamous, life-long relationships, do we somehow undermine heterosexual relationships?

Ephesians 5:1-2 and 21-33

This passage, which begins with the general command to be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ, also admonishes wives to “be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord” and just as the church is subject to Christ, so also “wives ought to, in everything, subject to their husbands” (vss.22-24). Husbands are admonished to love their wives “just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. . . so that she may be holy and without blemish” (vss. 25-27). Paul goes on to say that in the same way, “husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies” (vs. 28), before reiterating Genesis 2:24 that a “man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh” (vs. 31).

Traditional scholars cite this passage as an affirmation that marriage illustrates Christ’s self-sacrifice for the church as well as submission to Christ and that marriage (between a man and a woman) affirms the divine reality of the reflection of God in our lives and community.⁵⁵ Contemporary scholars express their discomfort with the hierarchical views that place women in subordinate roles⁵⁶ and stress that the culturally conditioned language and metaphors of the ancient church are not necessarily congruent

with ours. They remind us that there are scriptural bases for the belief that human beings can know truth apart from divine revelation.⁵⁷

I have attempted to provide a brief and balanced commentary on the scriptural passages about human sexuality that do not appear in the prayer book Lectionary or in the Revised Common Lectionary. I would like to suggest that the other prayer book lections used in the Celebration and Blessing of Holy Matrimony be combined with the controversial passages and recommend the following combination of readings for liturgical use:

Group 1

Hebrew Scripture Lessons: Genesis 19 – especially verses 1-9

Epistle Lessons: 2 Peter 2:4-10a

Gospel: Matthew 5:1-10

Group 2

Hebrew Scripture Lessons: Leviticus 18 – especially verses 19-23 and/or Leviticus 20 – especially verses 10-16.

Epistle Lessons: Romans 1:26-27 – include verses 18-31 and/or I Corinthians 6:9-11 and/or I Timothy 1:8-10.

⁵⁵ Stanley J. Grenz, *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective*, (Louisville 1990, 1997), p. 194. See also Richard B. Hays, “Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies,” p. 10, in Siker, *op.cit.*, pp. 3-17.

⁵⁶ Countryman, *op.cit.*, p. 194.

Gospel: Matthew 5:13-16

Group 3

Hebrew Scripture Lessons: Genesis 1:26-28 and/or Genesis 2:4-9 and 15-24

Epistle Lesson: Ephesians 5:21-33

Gospel: Mark 10:6-9 and 13-16

Group 4

Hebrew Scripture Lesson: Judges 19 – especially verses 22-26.

Epistle: Jude 5-7.

Gospel: John 15:9-12

⁵⁷ Choon-Leong Seow, “A Heterosexual Perspective,” pp. 17-25, in *Homosexuality and Christian Community*, *op.cit.*, pp. 14-27.

D. Some synthesis of liturgy and dialogue

If such topical lectionaries were approved for trial use by General Convention, parishes would have the flexibility and freedom to choose from cycles of readings around issues that are of concern to their communities. I believe that these topical lectionaries would allow church communities intentional and critical time to engage scripture that is pertinent to the issues that need to be addressed. Essential to such a process is the provision of bible study and structured conversation to facilitate holy listening. *Lex orandi, lex credendi* is more than the law of prayer being the law of faith, more than praying shaping believing. *Legum credendi lex statuat supplicandi* is more than the way we pray determining the way we believe. If it were as simple as this, we would not need a lectionary cycle beyond the four gospels or the fifty-two sets of readings found in the *BCP 1928*. It would be sufficient to gather in the Lord's name, proclaim some sub-set of the scriptures, say the Creed, pray for the world and the Church, exchange the peace, prepare the table, make eucharist, break the bread, and be dismissed. But we need to hear more, we yearn to hear more, and we are called by God to hear more. And we need the opportunity to collectively engage the Word.

Liturgy is our dialogue with God and scripture is God's dialogue with us. We are called to read, mark, and digest the Word. Our theology will be better informed if we have the means to do these things and do them together in the context of our liturgy. We Episcopalians are liturgical theologians whether we know it or not. This proposal will

offer a model for liturgical dialogue heretofore not employed in the Church's quest to weather the storms of controversy.

We have discussed in some detail the issues and concerns of the disjunctures in theological knowledge that exists in many cases between the clergy and laity, and have explored the main themes of liturgical theology and practical application of liturgical principles to resolving contemporary issues. We have also explored some of the main themes in Anglican/Episcopal theology and history in terms of how conflict has and can be engaged. In the next section, we will explore the religious, social, and historical context of Christian marriage.

CHAPTER IV

Christian Marriage: A Brief History of the Institution with a Commentary on the Marriage Canons of the Episcopal Church

As the Episcopal Church struggles to come to terms with the issues of human sexuality, particularly as they impact upon the debate about same-gender blessings, it is imperative that we have a solid grounding in both the history and theology of marriage in general and Christian marriage in particular. Research into the history of Christian marriage is a relatively recent scholarly endeavor in both historical and theological inquiry. The primary works in this field of research have tended to focus on the institution of marriage in a number of distinct ways, particularly historically, legally, sociologically, canonically, and theologically. Broadly speaking, historical inquiry has focused on the institution of marriage during discrete periods of time; legal studies, both from historic and contemporary perspectives, have focused on personal and property rights; sociological inquiry tends to focus its lens on cultural implications, particularly in terms of class, gender, race, and ethnicity; canonical studies, predominantly from a Roman Catholic perspective, have focused on ecclesiastical polity; and theological inquiries have been spread across scriptural, historical theological, and ethical interpretations. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief historical, theological, canonical analysis of Christian marriage.

We live in a time that has seen significant changes in the practices, customs, and attitudes about the institution of marriage. Divorce and infidelity are commonplace. More and more people are choosing to marry much later in life, if they marry at all. Many aspects of marriage are questioned, if not outright attacked. Is marriage a private affair between two consenting adults or is it a public institution that must conform to various social and political laws, as well as religious and familial customs? Just what is marriage, particularly Christian marriage, all about and why is it important?

The institution of marriage is recognized in some form by every culture in the world. In most cultures and religions, neither man nor woman is considered complete after reaching maturity without a spouse and in many religions marriage is considered a sacred act that originates from a god or as a union of souls or spirits with the sacred realm.⁵⁸ Jewish and Christian beliefs trace the origin of marriage to Adam and Eve. The contemporary Jewish understanding of marriage embraces the belief that nuptial blessings emphasize marriage in the scheme of creation and speak to the state of marriage as ‘paradise regained.’ Marriage is meant not only to perpetuate humanity, but should also enhance and complete the partners’ personal growth. The contemporary Christian understanding of marriage also embraces the notion of the sacred union of Adam and Eve and is regarded as a vocation. The ceremony joins the bride and groom into one spirit in union with Christ and can be understood as a metaphor for the marriage of the church to Christ. Monogamy, fidelity, life-long relationship, and procreation are the cornerstones of current Judeo-Christian beliefs about marriage.

In this examination of the history of marriage, we will see that concepts and practices surrounding marriage have been many and varied.

A. Marriage in Hebrew Scripture⁵⁹

Marriage was seen as part of the divine revelation and the theology of marriage was rooted in the account of the Creation. As part of creation, marriage was a powerful image for revealing and expressing Yahweh's relationship with his people. The institution of marriage as expressed in the Bible reflects a long history of sociological and cultural developments. The concepts and practices of marriage in Hebrew scripture can be best understood when considered over against such concepts as family, gender, social status, patriarchy, matriarchy, property, monogamy, polygamy, and household. It must be stressed that there are no fewer than seven contexts in which marriage is described in the Hebrew scripture – matriarchal marriage, patriarchal marriage, polygamy, monogamy, exogamy, endogamy, and levirate marriage.

Matriarchal Marriage

Matriarchal marriage assumes the authority of the mother and is also used to describe the way relationships are determined. In ancient Israel, the *sadiqa* marriage

⁵⁸ See the article by Edith Turner and Pamela R. Frese, "Marriage," in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Volume 9, pp.218-222.

⁵⁹ The following discussion is based on the article "Marriage," by O.J. Baab, in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Volume 3, (Nashville 1962), pp. 278-287.

described two forms of matriarchal marriage, the *beena* and the *mota*. *Beena* refers to the practice of children remaining under the control of mothers and husbands settle in the homes of their wives more or less permanently. *Mota* marriage refers to the practice of husbands visiting the homes of their wives periodically. In this matriarchal model, lineage is determined from the mother. Examples of a *beena* marriage can be seen in the cases of Jacob and Moses – both lived in the homes of their wives (Gen. 29:1-30; Ex. 2:21-22) for considerable periods of time. Samson's visits to his wife at Timnah describe a *mota* marriage (Judg. 15:1).

Patriarchal Marriage

Patriarchal marriage assumes the authority of the father upon the entire pattern of the family structure. Fathers arrange all marriages and husbands hold authority as the heads of the households. Descent is reckoned through the father. Children are identified through the father, particularly sons. The emphasis on authority of the father is found in the custom of the naming of children, particularly sons (Gen. 4:26, 5:3, 5:29, 16:15 and Ex. 2:22).

Polygamy

Literally meaning 'many marriages,' polygamy signifies more than one marriage alliance existing concurrently in the same family or family group. This practice was

widespread in ancient Israel and was intricately related to the desire for sons and the propagation of both the family and the nation. There are numerous examples of the practice in scripture: When Sarah could not bear a son for Abraham, Hagar became his second wife in order to fulfill that function (Gen. 16:3). Jacob was given Rachel and Leah by their father, Laban (Gen. 29:18-30). David had many sons through many wives and concubines (II Sam. 5:13-16). Solomon is reported to have had hundreds of wives, concubines, and children (I Kings 11: 1,3). The reasons for polygamy were, thus, varied – love, lust, the desire for children, and the building of political alliances.

Monogamy

The creation account in Genesis implies that the first ‘marriage’ was clearly monogamous: “A man. . . cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). Many passages seem to strongly imply monogamous marriage (Ex. 20:17, 21:5; Lev. 18:8, 16, 20, 20:10, and 21:13; Num. 5:12; Deut. 5:21, 22:22, and 24:5).

Exogamy and Endogamy

The practices of exogamy and endogamy were generally intimately related. Where exogamy required that marriage take place outside of a defined kinship circle, endogamy generally excluded marriage to members of communities outside of Israel. Esau (Gen. 36:2), Joseph (Gen. 41:45), and Moses (Ex. 2:21) followed the strictures of

exogamy when they married, yet seemingly ignored the sanctions against marrying foreigners (Ex. 34:16; Ezra 10:5; Neh. 10:28-30 and 13:23-27). The accounts of those who married outside of Israel reflect the interpenetration of cultures and peoples that occurred when many of the people of Israel resided in foreign lands and during the period of Israel's conquest of Canaan.

In addition to being perceived as a threat of social and cultural breakdown through intimate association with foreign peoples, marriage outside of Israel became to be perceived as a threat to Israel's faith. Intermarriage could undermine and destroy the integrity of Israel's faith and covenant with God. As we shall see, because many of the people of the covenant would become the community of Christ, endogamy would be the New Testament case for in-group marriage and marital relations.

In the predominantly patriarchal system of Israel, the father had complete control of the marriage process and the husband was the dominant partner in the marriage. Wives had few rights and freedoms – a husband could even revoke a vow that a wife made to God (Num. 30:10-14). Women were property; a daughter was subject to her father, a wife subject to her husband. Fathers initiated the marriage contract for their sons and accepted the terms for their daughters. Women were more or less passive participants in this process. Marriage was first and foremost a transaction or arrangement made between families and was not so much an act of mutual consent by the prospective bride and groom as it was a covenant entered into by two families to form an alliance.

The marriage covenant was sealed by the payment of the *mohar*, literally ‘bride’s price,’ to the father of the bride. With this gift, the betrothal was concluded, but there is some ambiguity as to whether or not the betrothal legally constitutes an actual marriage relationship. In Deut. 20:7 a distinction is made between betrothing a wife and taking her, while Deut. 22:23-24 makes it clear that a man who has intercourse with a betrothed woman is to be stoned to death because he has violated his neighbor’s wife. In Deut. 24 sexual relations with an unbetrothed virgin is grounds for marriage and payment of a fine to the father. Other passages equate the betrothal with marriage (Deut. 28:30; II Sam. 3:14). Although these passages describe a legally defined relationship, they do not seem to mean that the marriages have been solemnized.

The solemnization of a marriage was not a religious ceremony. These ceremonies did not take place in a temple or synagogue, nor were the priests/Levites involved. The wedding ritual was a public acknowledgment and celebration of the covenant made between two families. The ceremony of marriage marked the groom’s “physical possession of his wife.” This ceremony was marked by the procession: Bedecked in ornaments, garland, jewelry, and special attire (Song of Songs; Isa. 61:10; Ezek. 16), the bride and groom would leave their fathers’ homes and process with family and friends to meet at a predetermined location (I Macc. 9:39). Once at the home of the bridegroom, the bride would be given by her father to the groom and the wedding feast would commence. The wedding feast could last for days or weeks (Judg. 14:12; Tobit 8:20). Following the feast, the bride and groom would go to their marriage bed in the bridal tent where they

were left alone for the first time.⁶⁰ Consummation of the marriage heralded the end of the ceremony and the beginning of a new family unit.

It must be stressed that Hebrew law assigned low status to women. Once married, she was effectually the property of her husband, though he could not sell her (Deut. 21:14; Exod. 21:7). Women could neither inherit nor own property and had no rights of divorce. Husbands could divorce their wives for indecency or objectionable behavior (Deut. 24:1) by writing a certificate of divorce in which he declared that the woman was no longer his wife. Likewise, betrothed concubines could be set aside.

B. Marriage in the New Testament⁶¹

Compared to the number of passages in Hebrew scripture in which marriage is described and discussed, the New Testament is relatively silent on the subject. Aside from the wedding at Cana, there are no references to marriage ceremonies in the New Testament. Interestingly, most comments related to marriage are those of Jesus' condemnation of divorce (Mt. 19:4-6; Mk. 10:6-9), in which he declares the practice to be contrary to the will of God. As we shall see, various epistles address this teaching. In order to better understand early Christian attitudes about marriage, we will briefly look at marriage, family, and status in the Greco-Roman world.

⁶⁰ At some point just before or just after the consummation, the bride's virginity would be ascertained. If it was determined that she was not a virgin, the groom could divorce or set her aside.

⁶¹ The following discussion is based on the article "*Matrimony*," in F.L. Cross, ed., *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd edition ed. E.A. Livingstone, (New York 1997), pp. 1054-1056, and an unpublished paper by the Rev'd Dr. Wendell Meyer, *A Brief History of Christian Marriage*, (Cambridge 1997).

Initially, marriage was part of the ‘religion of the hearth.’ Each family had its own gods, prayers, rites, and sacrifices. A pre-wedding betrothal ceremony was held in the home of the bride and her father would make an offering to the household gods. The groom would place a ring on the fourth finger of the bride’s left hand to signify his possession of her. Wearing a veil and garlands, the bride was then processed to the home of the groom; upon arrival, she was carried over the threshold by the groom and brought to the family hearth. The bride would then be sprinkled with water and allowed to touch the sacred fire, followed by prayers and a sacrifice. Between the seventh and fifth centuries BCE, Roman marriage was secularized. The *paterfamilias* priesthood was divested of its authority, as were secular entities, and the essential act of marriage became a strictly private and personal family affair.

Such marriages were not devoid of ceremonial. Although marriage began with betrothal, an enforceable legal and economic agreement between the heads of two households concerning the future of the bride and groom, the act was both formalized and ritualized with a kiss. Consent was the sole requirement for a Roman marriage – all rites, ceremonies, processions, and feasting were non-essential elements used only to prove the existence of the consent. While consent signified the desire for permanent union, marriage was not indissoluble in the Greco-Roman world. Divorce was likewise a strictly private and personal affair. Initially, an oral repudiation was given by one spouse to another in the presence of seven witnesses; in later periods, written repudiations were required. Classical Roman law gave no specific grounds for divorce, but it was

commonly understood that divorce was justified as a result of adultery, the capture or enslavement of either spouse, sexual impotence, or insanity.

The institution of marriage in the early Christian period looked very much like marriage in the Greco-Roman world – it was a secular reality that had somehow lost the Jewish notion of marriage as a sacred relationship whose goodness rests in God's creation. In stark contrast to the number of references to marriage in Hebrew scripture, the New Testament is remarkably silent about the institution. Aside from the event at Cana – an event which is memorialized in the preface of nearly every Christian wedding ceremony – the Christian scriptures have very little to say about marriage. Various epistles provide some teaching and guidance about the responsibilities of and duties of husbands, wives, and children (I Cor. 7:1-16; Eph. 5:22-31 and 6:1-4). There is an emphasis in the Pauline letters towards the view of marriage as an impediment to the experience of salvation. It must be remembered that these early Christians were expecting the coming of the Kingdom in their very near future; their eschatological expectations had, to use a contemporary turn of phrase, no time and no room for such mundane matters as marriage.

According to some texts, one's preparation for the coming of the Kingdom called for the setting aside of all human relationships (Lk. 14:26); the Gospel of Mark quotes Jesus as saying that the moment of the eschaton will be particularly difficult for those who are pregnant or nursing (Mk. 13:17). The disciples themselves apparently set aside their marriages and families to follow Jesus. While marriage is not denigrated, it is not

accorded the significance given to it in the Hebrew scriptures. New Testament scriptures seem to emphasize the notion that marriage is for the spiritually impaired – those who can not rise to the taxing demands of true discipleship.⁶²

Paul carries on this theme in his first letter to the Corinthians. He admonishes the unmarried and widows to remain “unmarried as I am” (I Cor. 7:8); to those who are not practicing self-control “they should marry, for it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion” (I Cor. 7:9). He is quick to point out that those who marry will experience distress in this life:

The appointed time has grown short; from now on, let those who have wives be as though they have none. . . I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And unmarried women and virgins are anxious about the affairs of the Lord. . . but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraints upon you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord. (I Cor. 7:29-35)

Clearly, Paul, for all that he defends marriage earlier in the chapter, advocates that it is better that the members of the nascent Christian communities not marry.

The Gospels are very clear as far as divorce and remarriage concerned: “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery” (Mk. 10:11-12). The New Testament writers showed that they were rejecting certain teachings of the Hebrew scripture. They have the Pharisees challenging Jesus by arguing that Moses permitted

⁶² Meyer, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

divorce. Jesus counters that Moses permitted this simply because of the hardness of their hearts. The Matthean account also contains this story and emphasizes Jesus' teaching that God intended marriage for life "What God has joined together, let no one separate" (Mt. 19:3-9). As we shall see, the Episcopal Church has interpreted these passages in different ways throughout its history.

C. Marriage in the Patristic Period

By the end of the first century CE, the Christian community had to ask itself what it meant that the second coming had not taken place. Was the movement simply a reform movement within Judaism or was it meant for everyone? Certainly, the Gospel imperative was clear: "Go and make disciples of all nations." The experience of these early Christians was so intense that they felt compelled to share their faith with all peoples, yet their attempts to become intelligent to the larger community meant that they had to 'translate' Christianity into Greek images and lifestyles. In the process, Christianity adopted some of the images and lifestyles of other cultures.⁶³ Great Christian thinkers of this period were in turn influenced by Greco-Roman culture and philosophy. Elements of stoicism, gnosticism, manicheanism, and neo-Platonism influenced early Christian thought. Their arguments that the pleasures of the world were to be either severely controlled or enthusiastically spurned appealed to the idealism of many Christians, especially those who were disaffected by the movements of that era that

promoted a reckless abandonment of the senses. Even the more modest urgings toward physical enjoyment as a way to happiness rubbed against the ideals of early Christianity as promulgated in the New Testament.

How did this dualism effect attitudes about marriage?

Christian thinkers of this period were unsettled by the fact that the institution of marriage thrust people into the midst of the physical world; they had a difficult time seeing marriage as part of God's plan. The thought of two people thrust into animalistic postures during intercourse was abhorrent – surely God must have a better way for propagating humanity! Augustine of Hippo, writing in defense of marriage as part of God's plan, pointed to Adam and Eve and argued:

We read that they were already expelled from paradise when they had relations and conceived children. Still I do not see what could prevent their having an honorable marriage and an immaculate marriage bed even in paradise. When they were living faithfully and justly, serving Him with obedience and holiness, God could have arranged that, without any restless ardor of sensual desire, without any labor or childbirth pain, children would be born of their seed.⁶⁴

For Augustine and other early Christians, marital relations prior to the fall was a passionless activity designed to achieve the necessary end of having children. The concept of marriage and its purposes stretched the tolerances of the early Christian community, who struggled to find benefits in the institution.

Regardless of their feelings about marriage and intercourse, the early Christian community could not ignore the fact that the scriptures embraced the institution of

⁶³ Thomas M. Martin, *The Challenge of Christian Marriage: Marriage in Scripture, History, and*

marriage as a worthy estate. Where then did the Christians of the patristic period find the good in marriage given their belief that relationships between wives and husbands were irrevocably changed after the disobedience of Adam and Eve? The best answer comes from Augustine:

This is threefold: fidelity, offspring, sacrament. Fidelity means that one avoids all sexual activity apart from one's marriage. Offspring means that a child is accepted in love, is nurtured in affection, is brought up in religion. Sacrament means that marriage is not severed nor the spouse abandoned, not even so that the abandoner or the abandoned may remarry for the sake of the children.⁶⁵

Marriage is thus a way of avoiding promiscuity. This view is consonant with the New Testament writings that acknowledges the value of marriage as a check against the drives of passion. Sexual fidelity was equated with social stability. The procreation of children meant that the work of the church would be carried on. The 'sacramental' nature of marriage as espoused by Augustine was a way of describing the bond and covenant between a couple. It must be emphasized that such notions as 'the work of the kingdom,' 'fidelity,' and 'bond and covenant' were foundational to patristic-era beliefs and faith in God.

Little is known about marriage rites in the patristic period. What is known is that the early Christians simply got married according to the civil customs and ceremonies of the day. As late as the fourth century, the Council of Elvira acknowledged that Christians

Contemporary Life, (New York 1990), pp. 55-56.

⁶⁴ Martin, *op.cit.*, p. 63.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Martin, *op.cit.*, p. 66.

observed the same ceremonies as did non-Christians.⁶⁶ At some point around this period, bishops or priests began blessing married couples following the wedding. Although they also began officiating at the solemnization of the marriage, which included a eucharistic service, such ceremonies were not widespread.

D. Marriage in the Medieval Period

The patristic abhorrence of sexual intercourse, its emphasis on celibacy and virginity, and the promulgation of clerical celibacy carried on into the Middle Ages. Church authorities followed the writings of Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, and Origen in the belief that sex was a deadly spiritual danger that had to be combated even within the confines of marriage.⁶⁷ The rights of women continued to be severely proscribed in medieval society. Many patristic writers, chief among them Augustine, regarded women as inferior to men both physically and spiritually. Marriage continued to be primarily a secular affair through the fourth century, although the church exhorted the virtues and purposes of marriage that came from the patristic era.

Although marriage remained a secular affair throughout the greater part of the period, and Christians were not required to have the church officiate at their services until the eleventh century, the church became more and more involved in the institution as an arbitrator called upon to determine the civic obligations of this or that party. The church also had a continuing role in deciding what was sinful practice and what was not. The fall

⁶⁶ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Marriage*, (New York 1965), p. 245.

of the Roman Empire and the growing influences of non-Roman cultures would result some subtle and not so subtle shifts in the church's role in marriage and the emergence of the nuptial blessing.

In Gaul, the nuptial blessing took place over the couple while they lay in the marriage bed; in Italy, the blessing took place in the church building or at the church door. These two practices are indicative of changing attitudes as to the act that defined marriage. With the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West, the Christian understanding of marriage was also influenced by a marital definition which had German or Teutonic roots. Essentially, Germanic law understood marriage as union created by cohabitation rather than by a formal act or declaration; further, it understood three ways of contracting a marriage: by capture, by purchase, or by mutual consent. Little distinction was made between marriage and concubinage; the institution was sealed through consummation. As the Teutonic tribes converted to Christianity, these views clashed with the understanding of marriage that had developed in Roman-influenced church and society.

The many practices of marriage among the various peoples of the medieval world did not make it easy for the church to define a single act as the moment a marriage took place. As the church grew and increasingly exercised its authority in more aspects of everyday life, it also asserted its authority in marriage. The efficacy of marriage as promulgated in scripture could not be ignored and the church began to soften its dualistic base in teaching about marriage. This is not to say that dualism was dismantled; on the

⁶⁷ Meyer, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

contrary, it remained intact. What did begin to change was the way in which marriages took place and the basic idea as to what happens during the marriage ceremony. These changes in practice contributed to changes in the theology of marriage.

By the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the various elements in the liturgies of marriage – legal preliminaries, the giving away of the bride, the formal grant of a dowry, the exchange of promises, the blessing of the ring placed on the third finger of the bride, the nuptial mass, and the blessing of the marriage bed – were found in the pontificals and missals of Brittany, Normandy, and England. Earlier books did not give an indication as to what the first steps of the ceremony. In the pontifical of Lire in Normandy, and the missals of Rennes in Brittany and Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk, the descriptions of the service follow similar patterns:

In Rennes the *Ordo* opens: ‘First let the priest come before the door of the church [*ante ostium ecclesiae*] robed in alb and stole, with holy water’ . . . In Lire, ‘Before all else let those who are to be joined in the marriage bed come before the doors of the church [*ad janus ecclesiae*] before very many witnesses. . .’ Each partner is to rehearse his and her consent; the woman’s dower is to be confirmed, and some pennies get set aside to be distributed among the poor; the bride is to be given to the groom by her father and friends, and received by him ‘in God’s faith and his own, to be kept in health and sickness as long as she lives, and he is to take her by the right hand;’ the ring is blessed. . . in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and then the groom sets it on a finger of her left hand; prayers and blessing follow. They enter the church and prostrate themselves in the nave, and the priest recites prayers over them. Then they enter the choir and stand. . . as mass is celebrated. After the *Sanctus* they prostrate themselves in prayer and four men hold a cloak or a cloth over them. . .; at the *Pax* they rise, the groom receives the peace from the priest and gives it to his wife with a kiss, and the mass concludes with their communion – and the whole rite with the blessing of the bridal chamber at night.⁶⁸

This veritable codification of these aspects of the ceremony led to the acceptance of marriage as one of the sacraments of the church.

The sacramentalization of marriage was strongly influenced by Augustine and Duns Scotus. Augustine, building upon such passages as Ephesians 5, posited that marriage established a special bond between the partners and that the living out of this bond in a faithful way gave witness to the world of the commitment that existed between Christ and the church. Duns Scotus distinguished between the marriage contract and the sacrament of marriage – not every marriage was in and of itself sacramental. He posited that the nuptial blessing, not the contract, conferred the sacrament. Marriage only became sacramental when ratified by the church. Building upon these positions, medieval theologians argued that marriage not only *signified* a bond between the husband and the wife, but *created* the bond. Marriage was thus viewed as indissoluble. The development of this theology of marriage moved the church from the position of the early church Fathers that the dissolution of marriage was not permissible to the later and enduring position that its dissolution was not possible.⁶⁹

E. Marriage in the Reformation

The sacrament of marriage and issues of divorce and remarriage were addressed with zeal by such continental reformers as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Huldrych Zwingli. They rejected the notion of marriage as a sacrament, repudiated celibacy, and

⁶⁸ Christopher N.L. Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage*, (Oxford 1989), pp. 249-250.

generally allowed for divorce and remarriage. English reformer Thomas Cranmer did not view marriage as a sacrament, but as an ‘honourable estate, instituted of God in paradise.’ In general, the reformers moved away from the views and practices upheld by the Catholic Church, namely that marriage was a special sacrament entrusted to its care and upheld by an elaborate system of rules and regulations governing validity and lawfulness, and embraced a view that marriage was a natural institution that was part of God’s creation. They were content to allow civil authorities to regulate the validity and lawfulness of marriage. In this as in other secular matters, the church’s role was to exhort its members to moral behavior.

As regards marriage, the issues facing the Reformers were the definition of a sacrament, the requirements of the marriage contract, and the value of human sexuality. Sacraments, as defined by the Reformers, must include a sign given by Christ himself and must have a specific promise of grace. Martin Luther could not accept marriage as a sacrament ‘because there is no evidence that Christ determined any special ceremony for its making, or gave any special promise of grace to one who takes a wife.’⁷⁰ The marriage contract could be broken, even after consummation and childbirth, if parental consents had not been given or in the event of adultery or desertion. Melancthon, Zwingli, and Calvin also allowed for divorce in the event of cruelty, violence, or imprisonment. Understanding of human sexuality was based on the book of Genesis and found to be good. ‘This is the Word of God,’ Luther wrote, ‘by virtue of which. . . the passionate, natural inclination toward woman is created and maintained. It may not be prevented by

⁶⁹ Schillebeeckx, *op.cit.*, p. 284.

vow and law. For it is God's Word and work.'⁷¹ The reformer's words should not be misconstrued – the views of Luther and the reformers was closer to those of patristic and medieval thinkers. Marriage was for the purpose of pro-creation and the proscription of promiscuity.

Luther considered marriage a vocation appropriate for Christian living. He greatly abbreviated the marriage rite but retained the publication of banns and the custom of asking questions of betrothal on the porch of the church. Then followed the verse "Those whom God hath joined together" and a proclamation of the marriage.⁷² The couple were then led to the altar for the reading of Genesis 2:18, 21-24 and an exhortation consisting of scriptural quotations followed by prayer. The French, Swiss, and German reformers, owing to their dislike of blessing things, deleted the blessing of the ring but retained its exchange. Marriages were conducted within the Sunday service of the Reformed churches, with banns published beforehand.

The prayer book of 1549 give three reasons for the purpose of marriage: it was ordained for the procreation of children; as remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; and for mutual society, help and comfort, both in prosperity and adversity. Marriages took place in the church on Sundays after Morning Prayer and the Litany and before the Eucharist. The couple was charged to declare any known impediment as to why the couple could not lawfully be joined together, followed by the betrothal, the giving of the bride, and the exchange of unblest rings. A prayer for grace to keep the vows and live

⁷⁰ Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, cited in Christopher L. Webber, *Re-Inventing Marriage: A Re-view and Re-vision*, (Harrisburg 1994), p. 108.

⁷¹ Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, (New Haven 1982, p. 274.

⁷² These two elements were not in the English rites but did have precedents in the medieval German church.

according to God's law, a proclamation of the marriage, and a blessing preceded the movement of priest and couple to the altar. The couple then would kneel at the altar for the Kyrie, Lord's Prayer, preces, prayers for the gift of children and for the graces necessary to marriage. The priest blessed the marriage. Then followed a homily if the sermon did not expound on the duties of husbands and wives according to the scriptures. In this rite, the couple was required to receive communion.

The practices of the Reformers on the continent and in England contrasted from those of the Roman Church. Rome. Driven to narrower definitions by the impact of the Reformation, found itself defending a view of marriage in which law and sacrament were bound together. Marriage and the sacrament of marriage was defined as a contract; the contract was defined by consent and consummation. The quality of the relationship was not an issue – neither heresy, cruelty, nor adultery were grounds for divorce. The sacrament of marriage, in their theology, created a supernatural reality that even the church did not have the power or authority to change. Marriage was indissoluble.

F. Marriage in the Modern Period

The most significant change in the modern Christian church is its rejection of the dualism that anchored the patristic, medieval, and, to some extent, reformation periods. With changing times came changed attitudes about the purpose of marriage. In the Hebrew Scriptures marriage was seen as a way to achieve immortality (through children), security, prosperity, and identity. In the New testament, marriage was seen as a

distraction from the work of the Kingdom and the eschaton, but was necessary for the control of carnal appetites. The dualism of the early church could not support the expression of human passions even within the context of marriage. The failure of the appearance of the Second Coming forced the church to face a new reality. Since humanity needed to continue to propagate, marriage was embraced as a necessary facet of society. Medieval society continued to embrace the notion that any deliberate enjoyment of the carnal pleasures during intercourse was to be prohibited. However, the medieval church also began to view marriage as a cure for concupiscence – it helped two partners to remain faithful to one another. With the reformation period marriage began to be viewed as a way of helping to people grow in love. Physical intimacy was gradually seen as a help in the bond and covenant between two people, even though the primary purpose of marriage was for procreation.

The particularly rapid acceleration of social, political, economic, scientific, and intellectual changes rocked and transformed western society following the Reformation. For the purposes of this discussion, the Hardwicke Marriage Act of 1753 represents the apex of these changes as it effects marriage. Prior to this date, ecclesiastical ceremonies and official registration were not legally required for a valid marriage to be enacted. Entry into marriage was less formal and in some periods betrothal licensed sexual intercourse prior to the actual marriage ceremony. Courtship and attitudes to sexual intercourse prior to marriage were different prior to the Act.⁷³ Romantic love, the growth of individualism in social and economic life, and the choosing of partners by each other

began to profoundly effect the practice of arranged marriages for the sake of family alliances and economic gain.

The Marriage Act of 1753 was a response to the widespread practice of clandestine marriages. Since a church ceremony was not a legal requirement for a valid marriage, and the church recognized vows made by marrying couples, many marriages were conducted in secret. Individuals wishing to avoid the expense of a wedding, the opposition of parents and friends, or economic and property responsibilities engaged in these clandestine marriages that “failed to conform to the requirements of the canon law as to place, time, and procedure.”⁷⁴ This practice led to widespread irregularities and the frequent abuses of bigamy and ‘convenient’ divorce. The Marriage Act required registration of all marriages in England and Wales and set up the bureaucratic apparatus for uniformity and policing. Verbal contracts or pledges were no longer binding and couples were given the choice of having banns called in the parish of either one of them or obtaining a license to dispense with banns. Betrothal no longer had any legal force. Marriage became a very grave concern of the state.

Settlers in the North American English colonies brought with them the heritage of English law, but since many of them had come to the New World to escape some aspects of this heritage, they felt free to improvise in many respects and established new forms of government. New England colonists, drawing many principles in large part from Calvin’s Geneva, allowed for divorce and their laws were not overturned by the Privy Council. Following the American Revolution, many states enacted laws that allowed for divorce.

⁷³ Adrian Thatcher, *Marriage After Modernity: Christian Marriage in Postmodern Times*, (New York

England would not allow for divorce until the Divorce Act of 1857; France did not follow suit until 1894.

The scope of this discussion does not allow for further discourse on the many changes in attitudes about marriage. However, it must be noted that the period from 1850 to 1960 has been called the 'Era of Mandatory Marriage' when people married earlier, secular engagement replaced betrothal, and gender roles – the husband as principal breadwinner and the wife as dependent and mother – was firmly entrenched.

1999), pp. 28-29.

⁷⁴ R.B. Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage in England 1500-1800*, (London 1995), p. xiv.

G. Marriage in the Episcopal Church: The Prayer Book and Canon Law

The Episcopal Church's sources for its teachings about marriage and family has been largely grounded in prayer book liturgy, its rubrics about Holy Matrimony, and the legacy of the Church of England, all of which reflect the traditional teachings and attitudes already discussed. The opening address of the service of Holy Matrimony in the *Book of Common Prayer* outlines the three purposes of marriage:

The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord. (*BCP* p. 423)

Derived from the *King's Book* of 1543 and the English prayer books of 1549, 1552, and 1662, these purposes have been the cornerstone of Christian marriage in the West. In this section we will explore the ways in which the Episcopal Church has engaged and developed a theology of marriage.

In the United States, the subject of marriage first engaged the attention of the Episcopal Church at the General Convention of 1808 when the Diocese of Maryland requested that the Convention adopt the English Canon concerning marriage. While passed by the House of Deputies, the House of Bishops – citing the importance of the resolution, the fact that their House was too small (it consisted of only two members, Bishops White and Claggett), and that several churches were not present at the Convention as reasons why they did not wish to move on the matter – remanded the

resolution for future consideration.⁷⁵ The same Convention did pass a resolution about divorce that stated: “It is the sense of this Church, that it is inconsistent with the law of God, and the Ministers of this Church, therefore, shall not unite in matrimony any person who is divorced, unless it be on account of the other party having been guilty of adultery.”

The next canonical enactment on the subject of solemnizing of marriage occurred in 1868 as Canon 13 of Title II, which added the prohibition of marriage in cases where the divorced spouse of either party was still living. This prohibition did not apply to the innocent party in the case of adultery or those seeking to remarry. In the United States marriage, unlike most religious rites, is also a concern of the state. The minister acts on behalf of the civil government as a witness to the vows and is required by civil law to deliver a legal notice of the marriage to the appropriate state authorities. Clergy, by virtue of their ordination and denominational affiliation, are officers of the state and function as civil magistrates. This is a unique example of state appropriation – for civil purposes – of a religious rite.⁷⁶ Likewise, both civil and canon law placed the burden of responsibility for carrying out regulations regarding divorce squarely on the shoulders of the clergy.

Historically, the Episcopal Church’s engagement with its marriage canons have revolved around the issues and concerns of divorce. As we have seen, the Conventions of 1808 and 1868 directly addressed the issue. Concerned that the application of Church canons did not apply equally to clergy and laity, nor did they provide penalties for

⁷⁵ *Annotated Constitutions and Canons for the Government of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States*, Volume 1, (New York (1954), p.356.

⁷⁶ By contrast, the nation of France does not recognize the legality of religious rites. A couple must be married in a civil ceremony to be legally married.

offenders, the Church reconsidered its marriage canons again in 1877. Testimony favoring stricter applications included this report from one of the deputies:

A communicant of the Church formed an adulterous connection and was divorced, and then having completed his villainy, he came to a Clergyman of this Church to be married. The Clergyman, the facts being notorious, absolutely refused to do it. He went to every other Clergyman, sectarian and otherwise, in that village, and they all refused. He went then to an esquire, a member of the law, such as these men are, and the man married him without hesitation. Then he came back to his Clergyman (he was a lawyer himself), with this Canon, (the former Canon), in his hand, and he said to him: 'To be sure you could not marry me, but you cannot in any way touch me. I have been legally married by the law of the State, and there is no canon in your Church by which, having been so married, I can be desposed from the position of a Communicant of the Church.'⁷⁷

Passage of this canon then gave clergy the right to refuse the sacraments – except in the event of impending death – until such time that the case could be referred to the bishop.

Attitudes about divorce were varied. Some factions within the Church believed that the sanctions against divorce in the New Testament should be upheld and that sacraments should be denied anyone who was divorced, while others believed that divorce should be allowed and that sacraments should not be refused. This dichotomy and difference of opinion was so strong that the issue of divorce that the canon of 1877 remained without amendment until 1904, when a new canon was adopted. "Avowedly a compromise between those who desired that no remarriage. . . be permitted by the Church, and those who desired that an exception be made in the case of the so-called innocent party in a divorce for adultery." The exception remained, a waiting period was

⁷⁷ *Annotated Const. And Canons. . .*, p. 401.

imposed, and it was required that that satisfactory evidence of the legal divorce action be submitted to the bishop. A further revision restricted only clergy from remarrying.⁷⁸

A survey of the various pieces of marriage legislation discussed at General Convention from 1868 through 1937 will reveal a continuous dialogue between anti- and pro-divorce factions. Throughout this period, the canons of the Church placed responsibility for carrying out marriage canons on the clergy; priests could not solemnize marriages of divorced people without recourse to canon law; and the laity was not inhibited from contracting such marriages. General Convention 1922 amended the canon to read that it would be unlawful for *any* member of the Church to remarry in the event that there was a surviving spouse. By 1937, the Church admitted that its views on divorce and remarriage were being increasingly ignored by the public. Triennium after triennium, pro- and anti-divorce factions brought innumerable resolutions and amendments to the floors of both houses of General Convention.

By 1946, General Convention added new requirements and impediments to the list of those things which must take place before either marriage or remarriage could occur. It reaffirmed its commitment to marriage by adding a clause requiring that when ‘marital unity was imperiled. . . either or both married parties’ must seek out pastoral counseling before contemplating legal action.

The impediments to marriage contained in the canons in 1946 included

(1) Consanguinity (whether of the whole or the half blood) within the following degrees:

(a) One may not marry one’s ascendant or descendant.

⁷⁸ Robert E. Hood, *Social teachings in the Episcopal Church*, (Harrisburg 1990), p. 137.

- (b) One may not marry one's sister.
- (c) One may not marry the sister or brother of one's ascendant or the descendant of one's brother or sister.
- (2) Mistake as to the identity of either party.
- (3) Mental deficiency of either party sufficient to prevent the exercise of intelligent choice.
- (4) Insanity of either party.
- (5) Failure of either party to have reached the age of puberty.
- (6) Impotence, sexual perversion, or the existence of venereal disease in either party undisclosed to the other.
- (7) Facts which would make the proposed marriage bigamous.⁷⁹

This list of impediments was designed to clearly apply to all marriages. Remarriage was permitted, but only when a bishop pronounced the judgement that no true Christian marriage had existed in the first place. While this canonical provision was moderately serviceable, it placed the emphasis on a legalistic, rather than a pastoral approach to divorce. As we shall see, the explication of these impediments would change dramatically in 1973.

While the question of divorce continued to be contentious through the 1970s, there was enormous optimism throughout the Episcopal Church and the United States of America for much of this time. The Second World War had ended and a new era was beginning. New communities were growing up around family, school, and church and there was a tremendous optimism about the role of the family. Where, in the 1920s, the Church had proclaimed marriage as 'not an end in itself, but the divinely appointed agency whereby God's will may be fulfilled in giving life, protection and proper rearing to the young children of the human species,'⁸⁰ by the late 1950s and early 1960's it

⁷⁹ *Annotated Const. And Canons*, pp. 411-412.

⁸⁰ *Journal of General Convention 1922*, pp.697-8.

understood that sexual relations were not merely for the purposes of procreation. Marriage was also recognized as the place where implicit in the bond between husband and wife was the relationship of love with its sacramental expression in physical union.⁸¹ This optimism around sexuality was, however, short-lived.

Some scholars note that sexuality in the United States moved through several phases: from the eighteenth century that focused on the family for procreative purposes, to nineteenth century notions around romantic ideas about personal intimacy, and into the multiplicity of attitudes that developed through the twentieth century. Rapid and radical changes in society during the 1960s had a telling effect on sexuality and sexual morality. Sexuality and sexual morality became matters of private choice, personal identity, erotic pleasure, and political liberation ‘often subject to no restraints or accountability.’⁸² Just as many in the Church ignored its teachings about divorce in the first half of the century, many ignored the Church’s teachings about sexuality and sexual morality. Earl H. Brill, writing in **The Church’s Teaching Series**, noted that American society was feeling a considerable degree of anxiety in the 1970s

and with good reason. A rising divorce rate, a variety of live-together arrangements that seem to indicate a repudiation of marriage by the young – not to mention such phenomena as swinging, open marriages, communal living, group marriages, free sex – all of these things support the view that marriage as we know it is in trouble.⁸³

⁸¹ *Journal of General Convention 1961*, p. 548.

⁸² Hood, *op.cit.*, p.145.

⁸³ Earl H. Brill, *The Christian Moral Vision*, (San Francisco 1979), pp. 112-113. Hereafter referred to as *TCMV*.

While he was quick to point out that no one need fear that neither the institution nor the family was going to disappear, he did emphasize that the stresses imposed by society on marriage were signs of significant changes in American society.

Robert E. Hood posits that changing ideas about sexuality and sexual morality was fundamentally changed by a series of events: sex-change surgery, feminism, and the gay liberation movement. He notes that in 1967 the Joint Commission on Human Affairs identified such times as signs of confusion within secular society as well as the church community. In their report to General Convention 1967, the Commission wrote:

The complex, sometimes referred to as the 'New Morality,' reflects changes in practice and attitudes in sexual behavior in which the Church must be keenly aware. . . The traditional and often stereotyped attitudes of the Churches may no longer provide adequate guidance for people today.⁸⁴

While the commission singled out Genesis 1:27 as the basis of the Church's teachings about sexuality – 'male and female created he them' – it also pointed out that the national church's attitude should be changed to focus on relationships of forgiveness and avoidance of 'chastising or ostracising those members who have suffered from censure or other consequences of their behavior.' General Convention responded by approving a resolution that recognized sexuality as a gift of God's creation. The resolution also noted that sex and sexual practices should be a matter of private moral choice. It further called for further studies on such related issues as birth control, contraception, sterilization, illegitimacy, divorce and remarriage, sexual behavior of single adults, homosexuality, and prostitution.

Such was the state of the Episcopal Church and American society by 1973 when the General Convention of the Episcopal Church was confronted with almost forty proposals calling for amendments to or repeals of certain canons on Holy Matrimony. As we have seen, changes in the marriage canon in 1946 allowed for remarriage. This provision rested on what Brill has described as a ‘curious and rather dubious theological proposition that a true Christian marriage is indissoluble whereas another, presumably more ordinary marriage,’ may be dissolved. The anomaly caused by this contradiction led to the 1973 adoption of a new canon which explicitly recognized the termination of a marriage and the right of partners to be remarried with the blessing of the Church. To the question of how this decision could be reconciled with the traditional Christian commitment to the permanence of the marriage bond, Brill, speaking on the behalf of the Church, wrote:

Many people have raised this question, some even accusing the church of abandoning traditional moral standards and accommodating itself to the lax standards of an era that has no idea of what the church means by Christian marriage.

It is certainly true that divorce has become widespread in our society, to the extent that some social critics have said that America practices serial monogamy – only one wife at a time. We would have to concede that many couples rush headlong into divorce the moment conflict or dissatisfaction appear in their marriage.

The answer to these critics is that the church does not sanction a casual or neutral attitude about divorce. Christians do intend their marriages to be permanent and are obligated to make every effort to achieve that permanence. Nevertheless it is clear that, at all times and places, some marriages have ended in disaster. There is no moral superiority in

⁸⁴ Quoted in Hood, *op.cit.*, p. 146.

requiring a couple to live together long after the disappearance of the love and faithfulness that bound them together.

The final decision for a divorce can be made only by the persons involved. No amount of advice can substitute for the risk of personal choice. But once that choice is made, it is incumbent upon the whole Christian community to show the divorced persons the love and care and support that will enable them to persevere through their crisis and begin to rebuild their lives. There is no room for moralistic judgment upon the brother or sister who has made that painful choice. (pp. 104-106 *TCMV*)

The 1973 amendments clarified and simplified not only the canons about divorce and remarriage, but also the guidelines for the solemnization of Holy Matrimony.

The most recent amendment to the marriage canons occurred at General Convention 2000. A response to the growing awareness of domestic violence in our culture, the amendment addressed the canon regarding marital unity and requires the clergy to ‘*protect and promote the physical and emotional safety of those involved and only then, if it be possible, to labor that the parties may be reconciled.*’

We have seen how the Church – attempting to genuinely and intentionally meet the needs of society – has engaged issues of marriage, divorce, and remarriage in canon law. Our discussion will conclude with an exploration of the rites and ceremonies of marriage.

We began our discussion about marriage in the Episcopal Church with the comment about the sources for the teaching about marriage and family being grounded in prayer book liturgy and rubrics. An examination of our historic and contemporary prayer books best illustrates the Church’s changing attitudes and beliefs about marriage and sacraments. The first prayer book in 1549 listed the three purposes of marriage as

the procreacion of children, to be brought up in the feare and nurture of the Lord, and prayse of God. Secondly it was ordeined for a remedie agaynst sinne, and to auoide fornicacion. . . Thirde for the mutuall societie, helpe, and coumfort, that one oughte to haue of thother, both in prosperitie and aduersitie.

The second prayer book in 1552 added the view that marriage was a second-best state for those persons “as haue not the gyfte of continecie.” In the spirit of compromise with the Puritans, the 1662 revision made the eucharist optional at the marriage. The first American prayer book of 1789 did not contain a list of the purposes of marriage and struck the phrase “with my body I thee worship” that accompanied the giving of the ring. It contained a shortened ceremonial that resembled the earlier civil marriage form. Various changes came and went during the course of prayer book revision in the United States from 1892 to 1928. The 1928 prayer book removed the unilateral promise of the woman to obey the man and the necessity of endowing one another with one’s worldly goods. The 1979 prayer book placed marriage within the Liturgy of the Word and the Eucharist.

The marriage services in the *Book of Common Prayer 1979* reflected to varying degrees the changes in attitudes being wrought in American society in general and the Episcopal Church in particular. The 1979 prayer book broadened the options for scriptural readings, added the congregational pledge to support the couple in their lives together, made the giving of the bride optional, and added an informal ‘Order of Marriage’ as well as a separate ‘Blessing of a Civil Marriage.’ The trajectory of revision placed emphasis on the increasing recognition of the eucharistic context of marriage,

acknowledged changing roles in the family, and recognized the importance of the community as a part of the covenant process.⁸⁵

The theology of marriage espoused in the rites of the current prayer book reflects many the teachings and learnings of the past two-thousand years. The opening address asserts that marriage was established in creation by God and that Jesus ‘adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana.’ The purposes of marriage are for the mutual joy, help, comfort of the couple, and – if it is possible or desired – the procreation of children. The rubrics of the prayer book require that marriage must conform to the canons of the Episcopal Church. Together with the rite, this establishes several assumptions and expectations:

- Marriage is required to be without coercion; it is an act of free will.
- Marriage is faithful, monogamous, and life-long. It is activated by having, holding, honoring, loving, and cherishing.
- Marriage endures through changing circumstances and should not be dissolved by illness, financial reverse, or difficult times.
- Marriage makes a couple metaphorically one flesh, one heart, one soul.
- Marriage is a sign to the world of healing and reconciliation and is characterized by growth.
- Witnessing a marriage is assumed to strengthen other married couples.

⁸⁵ Jennifer M. Phillips, “*A Critique of the Rite of the Celebration and Blessing of a Christian Marriage*,” in Ruth Meyers, ed., *A Prayer Book for the 21st Century*, Liturgical Studies 3, pp. 110-129., (New York 1996); see especially pp. 111-112.

Marriage has come to be seen as more than a covenant between two people; it has come to be seen as a kind of covenant between various members of a given community to support those who are married.

For the past twenty years, issues and questions about marriage, human sexuality, and same-sex unions have engaged the Episcopal Church in often contentious ways. It seems that one can no longer talk about any one element without also talking about the other two in some way, shape, form, or manner. Like the times in which we live, the issues and questions are more and more complex. The purpose of this chapter has been to provide some historical and theological context to one of the most contentious issues and realities that has ever confronted the Church: human sexuality.

CHAPTER V

A. Introduction

Behold the Face of God. This was the pronouncement that greeted visitors, deputies, and bishops as they entered the Colorado Convention Center, strung from the long, narrow standards bearing a dozen faces on the light poles outside and emblazoned on the huge banner of the face of Christ hanging over the entrance to the worship hall that was composed of thousands of faces representing every race and ethnicity represented in the Church. Women, children, and men; lay people, deacons, priests, and bishops. Members of the ‘Greatest Generation,’ Baby Boomers, GenXers, and everyone in between; married, single, widowed. Thousands of faces with thousands of stories. I cannot help but wonder how many of those faces are lesbian and gay folk with stories to tell about what it is like to be a homosexual in our Church.

From the journal of Priscilla Bates-Makarias, July 2000

During the months and weeks leading up to the 73rd General Convention⁸⁶ of the Episcopal Church, denominational periodicals were filled with articles, editorials, opinion pieces, and letters to the editors about the ‘big’ issues that the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops would be considering in their legislative deliberations – full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the 20/20 evangelism proposal, and the report of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music regarding the blessing of same-sex unions. Where the first elicited continued approbation and the

⁸⁶ The General Convention of the Episcopal Church is the official legislative body of the denomination and meets once every three years. It is bicameral in structure, consisting of the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops. The House of Deputies is composed of approximately 900 members – a maximum of

second general affirmation, the third issue was the subject of the most heated discourse. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an historical and theological survey of the dialogue on human sexuality in the Episcopal Church during the last twenty-five years and to explore the implications of this dialogue on the conversations and decisions that effect the lives of lesbian and gay⁸⁷ Church members made in Denver by the 73rd General Convention.

B. Seeds of Controversy: General Convention 1976-1988⁸⁸

On Saturday, December 16, 1989, the Bishop of Newark ordained an openly gay man to the priesthood of the Episcopal Church. The ordination of Robert Williams by Bishop John Shelby Spong generated renewed debate and controversy in a church that has been in a continuing dialogue over the issue of gay and lesbian ordination since the early 1970's.⁸⁹ The issue of lesbian and gay ordination first came to national attention in 1975 when Ellen Barrett, an openly non-celibate lesbian, was ordained to the transitional

eight deputies from each domestic and overseas diocese, four of whom are lay and four are clerical. The house of Bishops consists of approximately 250 active and retired bishops.

⁸⁷ Throughout this analysis the terms *lesbian* and *gay* will be used to refer to those women and men who identify themselves as homosexual. The complexities of the issues around bisexuality and transgenderedness are beyond the scope of this analysis.

⁸⁸ The following discussion on the historical and theological issues surrounding human sexuality, particularly as it impacted the Church's conversation about homosexuality, lesbian and gay ordination, and same-sex unions through the 70th General Convention, is based, with revisions, on my thesis *THERE SHALL BE NO OUTCASTS: A Comparative Analysis of Episcopal Church Attitudes toward the Ordination of Sexual Minorities*, (Harvard Divinity School 1994), pp. 4-9, 25-43. All other aspects of the discussion in Part II and the forgoing analysis are based on current research for my D.Min. thesis.

⁸⁹ Public debate about the place of homosexual people in the Episcopal Church began well over two decades ago. The Pastoral Committee of the House of Bishops began grappling with the issue of homosexuality among clergy in the early 1960's. According to the Paul Moore, former diocesan bishop of New York, such matters were discussed 'behind closed doors.' See Paul Moore, Jr., *Take a Bishop Like Me*, (New York 1979), p.54.

diaconate by Paul Moore, Jr., the Bishop of New York, and again in 1977 when she was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Moore⁹⁰. This ordination took place a short time after the 65th General Convention in 1976 where the agenda included two emotionally charged issues: the ordination of women to the priesthood and the episcopate and a resolution regarding the rights of gay and lesbian people in the Church and society. Given the furor surrounding the ordination of women, the resolution, which affirmed the conviction of the General Convention that 'homosexual persons are entitled to equal protection of the law with all other citizens,' passed without apparent contention. All eyes were turned to the proceedings of both Houses as the question of the ordination of women was debated. It was not until the 66th General Convention in 1979 that the question of gay and lesbian ordination was directly addressed. In 1976, the Episcopal Church approved the ordination of women, an event that over-shadowed a directive to the Joint Commission on Human Affairs to 'Study in depth the matter of the ordination of homosexual persons and report its findings. . . to the Church at large'⁹¹; in 1979, resolutions 'cautiously allowed for the ordination of celibate homosexuals'⁹² were over-shadowed by the finalization of the new *Book of Common Prayer*. These events are inextricably entwined in the Episcopal Church's attempts to bring traditionally marginalized groups into all levels of Church life.

The struggle for acceptance to Holy Orders by women and gay and lesbian people

⁹⁰ That same month, Susan Bergmans was ordained to the Episcopal priesthood by William Swing, the Bishop of California. This ordination received little media attention in light of the Barrett ordination. See the press release attached to the Episcopal News Service (ENS) article, "*Amid a Chorus of Protests Diocese of Newark Ordains Openly Gay Man*," ENS 89-260, 16 December 1989.

⁹¹ See the *Journal of the 65th General Convention 1976*.

⁹² John Booty, *The Episcopal Church in Crisis*, (Cambridge 1988), p. 143.

in the Episcopal Church has taken place in a society where institutions and the fundamental assumptions of their members have been geared to the repression and subordination of sexual minorities. The demands of these minorities for full acceptance in church and society have challenged these institutions and assumptions. In the case of the ordination of women, many of the theological and cultural arguments that traditionally inhibited their entry into the priesthood were overcome after years of struggle. For gays and lesbians, similar theological and cultural prohibitions present barriers to their entry and participation in the ordained ministries of the Episcopal Church.

The history of the Episcopal Church's attitude towards gays and lesbians is at once both ancient and contemporary. While it is clear that the Christian Church has been confronted with issue of homosexuality since the first century CE,⁹³ the American Church has only recently turned its attention to dealing with the issues in a forthright and open manner. Although many dioceses of the Episcopal Church have engaged in discussions about human sexuality since the 1970's, it was not until the General Convention of 1988 adopted Resolution D-120, which urged each congregation and diocese to engage in an open dialogue on human sexuality. Some of these debates - following similar lines of reasoning that were used to dispel the scriptural and social arguments against the ordination of women - have concluded that gay and lesbian sexuality should not be a barrier to ordination. Much to the national Church's credit, the

⁹³ See for example: John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*, (Chicago 1980); Bernadette Brooten, "Why Did Early Christians Condemn Sexual Relations Between Women?" *Society of Biblical Literature Lecture* (8 December 1992) and *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism*, (Chicago 1996); and Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, (London 1975).

questions and issues surrounding homosexuality have come to be viewed as ultimately questions and issues of *human sexuality*.

Although the Episcopal Church has engaged the debate in the broad terms of human sexuality, the national church has chosen to stand behind a recommendation drafted at the General Convention of 1979. While it can be interpreted as cautiously allowing for the ordination of celibate gay and lesbian people, this resolution, A-53s, excludes from ordination those persons, both heterosexual and homosexual, involved in sexual relations outside of marriage through its affirmation of Christian 'Marriage, marital fidelity, and sexual chastity as the standard of Christian sexual morality.'⁹⁴ The wording and spirit of this resolution set the tone for the debate that has continued to occupy the minds and energies of many people in the Episcopal Church since 1979. For those who support the full inclusion of gay and lesbian people into the total life of the Church, the resolution raises a number of possible assumptions: Since the Church is recommending that all candidates for Holy Orders conform to the standards of Christian sexual morality described in the resolution of 1979, one should not expect a change in the canons until such time as the Episcopal Church canonically recognizes same-sex unions. Same-sex unions will not occur until the Church is able to articulate a theology of Christian Marriage that is inclusive of both heterosexuals and homosexuals. A new understanding of Christian Marriage, like any attempt to reach a new understanding in an ages-old institution – witness the decades long struggle to bring about the ordination of women in all dioceses – will require many years of conversation at the parish, diocesan,

⁹⁴ See the *Journal of the 66th General Convention 1979*.

and national levels.

These assumptions in turn raise many more questions: Is it feasible to expect the General Convention to canonically support the ordination of openly lesbian and gay people through the approval of same-sex rites of Christian Marriage in a church and country that is divided over whether or not homosexuality is moral? Do those who favor full inclusion for gays and lesbians want to run the risk that the national church will move from its purely recommendational, non-canonical positions, to ones that constitutionally prohibit marriage rites and ordination for *all* homosexual individuals? Or should one take a wait-and-see position and hope that the 'mind of the Church' will change over time? How will the Church be able to reach a consensus on a theology of marriage that embraces same-sex unions? Can the Church reach a consensus on a theology of sexuality?

As noted above, the ordination of Ellen Barrett to the transitional diaconate in 1975 and her ordination to the priesthood in 1977, touched off the nation-wide Church debate around homosexuality. Prior to 1975, the only mainline Protestant denominational ordination of an openly gay individual had taken place in the San Francisco Bay Area when a small United Church of Christ parish congregationally ordained William Johnson in 1972. Barrett's ordination was the first highly publicized openly gay or lesbian ordination to take place in the Episcopal Church.

In response to the outcry that followed the ordination of the Reverend Ellen Barrett, Bishop Moore and the Standing Committee of the Diocese of New York issued a statement on 18 January 1977 in which they outlined their reasoning for ordaining an

openly homosexual person. Their response is quoted at length here because it is as pertinent today as it was twenty years ago:

Prejudices passed down through the centuries have made it difficult for most of us to make a genuinely Christian judgment of the homosexual condition. We know, however, that a great deepening and broadening of our understanding of human sexuality has emerged in recent years, nurtured by the interaction between traditional Christian theology and our modern world's perception of human nature. There has, for one thing, been decided movement in the Church away from a tradition which grudgingly accepted sex for procreative ends only toward a more encompassing, psychosomatic view of sexuality as a good and desirable way of expressing a loving relationship between persons. One telling result of this theological shift is the general acceptance within the Anglican Communion of birth control as a fully moral practice. . . In shifting away from an exclusively procreative view of sex to one of sex as a human expression of love, we move beyond explicit Biblical guidance. I pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us. The Church has reawakened to the realization that Truth is an open-ended process of progressive revelation, and what we are witnessing in our time with regard to human sexuality is just such a process. . . For most people, however, this rethinking of the morality of sexual expression is yet to be extended to homosexual persons. I believe that their recognition as full members of the Church with the opportunities, rights, and responsibilities of all other members is based ultimately on Jesus' view of human nature as reflected in the Gospel. Again and again, he broke through the prejudices of the day to accept and lift up those rejected and downgraded by others. And just as the reasons for their rejection were often beyond their control, so the homosexual person's condition is generally not a matter of conscious choice. . . The forces that shape sexual orientation are still somewhat mysterious, but there is general agreement that our sexuality is forged at an incredibly early age, long before puberty. Thus, a person's sexual preference is not in the category of sin, and the sometimes violent social prejudice against the homosexual condition comes painfully close to the recorded targets of Jesus' preaching. . . As a Church, we are only beginning to work out the complicated issues in the area of human sexuality.⁹⁵

With this statement, the theological debate was outlined and the Episcopal Church began

⁹⁵ Moore, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-115.

to study in earnest the issues of gay and lesbian participation in the life of the Church and society.

At the diocesan level, various commissions were established to explore the questions of human sexuality and gay and lesbian ordination. One such commission, the Screening Task Force of the Commission on Ministry in the Diocese of Ohio, provided one of the first analyses of the scriptural and social barriers that impinged upon the rights of gay and lesbian people. Their arguments have been echoed in the numerous diocesan reports that were issued prior to the General Convention of 1979. Following a similar line of reasoning that was used to dispel the scriptural arguments against the ordination of women, the Task Force of the Diocese of Ohio recognized that the Scriptures were culturally influenced by the experiences of the early Hebrew and Christian peoples. They wrote that

though sexual activities and their acceptance are reported at a number of points in the Bible, it is not necessarily indicated that these are to be considered applicable and binding for all times. . . For the purpose of this Biblically based position paper, any mode of sexuality (autosexual, bisexual, celibate, heterosexual, or homosexual) contains within it the possibility of supplanting God's love with that of the self or another person. . . Rather than condemning one or another expression of human sexuality, Scripture seems more truly concerned with condemning idolatry and selfishness based on sexual expression. It would appear that Scripture speaks of human sexual activity in an inspired way, and not as a revelation of the divine will. . .⁹⁶

Citing the dangers of the misuses of Scripture, such as proof-texting to support personal agendas, the Commission noted that the Bible was not intended to further a goal of

personal vindication, nor is it to be used as an argument against itself.

Turning to the question of male/female relationships and the traditional view that sexual relationships are only appropriate within the context of Christian Marriage between women and men, the Commission's conclusions foreshadowed future debate when they stated that while marriage between women and men had been the standard, there were many types of interpersonal relations. The Commission noted that heterosexuals, homosexuals, and bisexuals should be encouraged to be the most loving partners that they are able to be. This 'would seem more congruent with the Episcopal Church's stand on moral and ethical teachings.'⁹⁷

Opponents of the ordination of lesbian and gay persons continued to cling to traditional interpretations of the Bible, arguing - as they do to the present day - that homosexual behavior is an unacceptable expression of human sexuality that is condemned in Scripture. The foundation of their arguments rest on a number of Biblical texts: Genesis 1:26-2:25 (the Creation Story, the creation of Eve from Adam's rib, the imperative of procreation); Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Deuteronomy 23:17, I Kings 14:24/15:12/22:46, I Corinthians 6:9, and Romans 1:26-27 (unnatural sexual relations); I Corinthians 7, II Corinthians 6:14-18, and Ephesians 5:21-33/6:1-9 (marriage and purity); Genesis 19:1-28 (the story of Sodom and Gomorrah), and Judges 19 (the story of Gibeah) to name a few.

Although current scholarship supports the assertions of the supporters of gay and lesbian inclusion in all sacraments, many conservatives in the Episcopal Church continue

⁹⁶ See the *Report of the Screening Task Force of the Commission on Ministry*, Episcopal Diocese of

to assert the traditional understanding that God created man and woman, that men and women should procreate, and that human sexuality can only be expressed within the context of marriage. As we shall see, this interpretation was to have a significant effect on the debate around the full sacramental inclusion of gay and lesbian people.

Following the furor around the ordination of Ellen Barrett, the attempt by some bishops to censure Paul Moore at the Port St. Lucie meeting of the House of Bishops in 1977, and the continuing debate about homosexuality in American religion and society, the Episcopal Church prepared for the General Convention of 1979. The Church's Standing Commission on Human Affairs and Health, under the chairmanship of the Right Reverend Robert R. Spears, presented a comprehensive report to the General Convention that recommended that homosexuality should not be an 'absolute barrier to ordination,' and cautiously suggested that there should be no barrier 'to the ordination of homosexual persons who are able and willing to conform their behavior to that which the Church affirms as wholesome.' The General Convention rejected the Spears Report and adopted a substitute resolution from the Ministry Committee of the House of Bishops which took a stand against the ordination of 'practicing homosexuals' and cautiously allowed for the ordination of celibate gay and lesbian people.

The essential points of Resolution A-53s are summed up in the following excerpt:

RESOLVED, that this General Convention recommends. . . the following considerations. . . 1. There are many human conditions, some of them in the area of sexuality, which bear upon a person's suitability for ordination; 2. Every ordinand is expected to lead a life which is 'a

Ohio, (November 1976), pp. 5-6

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.18-22.

wholesome example to all people' (Book of Common Prayer, pp.517, 532, 544). There should be no barrier to the ordination of qualified persons of either heterosexual or homosexual orientation whose behavior the Church considers wholesome. 3. We affirm the traditional teaching of the Church on marriage, marital fidelity, and sexual chastity as the standard of Christian sexual morality. Candidates for ordination are expected to conform to this standard. Therefore, we believe it is not appropriate to ordain a practicing homosexual, or any other person who is engaged in heterosexual relations outside of marriage.⁹⁸

Following the passage of this resolution, a group of twenty-one dissenting bishops composed and signed a statement that they could not abide by the recommendation of the general Convention. They observed that

homosexual orientation as such, nor the responsible and self-giving use of such a mode of sexuality constitutes. . . a scandal in and of itself. . . For we are persuaded that modern exegesis and interpretation of Scriptures. . . gives no certain basis for a total or absolute condemnation of either homosexual persons or of homosexual activities in all cases. Holy Scripture indeed condemns homosexual excesses and exploitation, but in no less condemns heterosexual excesses and exploitation as well; and as a cure for the latter is a more responsible and less selfish expression of heterosexuality, so the cure for the former is a more responsible and less selfish expression of homosexuality.⁹⁹

Thus was the tone set for the wide-ranging debates around the issues of gay and lesbian ordination. As we shall see in the concluding section of this analysis, the nature of the conversation was to be indelibly cast in the context of Christian sexual morality.

Following the General Convention of 1979, there was little heard on the sexuality issue, at least formally, for several years. No resolutions were debated or adopted at the 1982 General Convention in New Orleans. The issue of gay and lesbian ordination was

⁹⁸ *Journal of the 66th General Convention 1979.*

back before the Church at the General Convention of 1985 when the House of Bishops proposed that access to ordination should not be denied on 'the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, sex, *sexual orientation* [italics added], physical disabilities, or age, except as otherwise specified by canon.' The resolution failed by a narrow majority in the House of Deputies. An attempt to pass the same resolution in 1988 ended with the House of Deputies once again voting by a narrow majority to turn back the proposal.

What ever hopes that gay and lesbian people and their supporters might have entertained for the General Convention of 1991 were dashed in the backlash that followed the ordination of Robert Williams, an openly gay man living in relationship with another man. His ordination by John Shelby Spong, Bishop of Newark, on 16 December 1989 received far more media attention than had the ordination of Ellen Barrett twelve years and a day before. The media had picked up on the story several days prior to the scheduled date. The news made national headlines.

In response to the pre-ordination publicity, Edmond Browning, then Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, made a statement on 15 December in the hope of defusing a potentially explosive situation. In that statement he reiterated the 1979 resolution and said that

it is my hope that the ordination in Newark will encourage positive debate, rather than polarization. It is my prayer that the debate will be conducted with respect and in an understanding that we are not talking about 'us' and 'them.' We are one Church family and are talking about how we will live together. . . I must confess to you that there are times when I would like not to have to address such issues, especially when they are sensationally

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* See also the *Journal of the 69th General Convention 1988*, which records additional signers to the original statement of 1979.

reported on. . . Even as I know avoiding them would be more comfortable in some ways, I know that we have no place for hypocrisy in the radical message of Jesus to us.

This and subsequent statements from the office of the Presiding Bishop and the House of Bishops did little to stem the tides of the vitriolic debates that swept the Episcopal Church toward the General Convention in Phoenix.

As in the case of the Barrett ordination in 1977, questions arose around the interpretation of Scripture and the Church's position on sexual morality. Traditionalists continued to espouse their views that homosexuality was an 'abomination' and that the ordination of an avowed, practicing homosexual was contrary to the laws of God and Church. Supporters of gay and lesbian ordination continued to clamor for the full inclusion of homosexuals into the life of the Church. People on both sides of the issue called for a definitive statement from the National Church on a theology of sexuality. The Episcopal Church was severely shaken.

The fragile unity of the Episcopal Church was further exacerbated when, six weeks after his ordination, Robert Williams touched off yet another dimension of the furor by making disparaging remarks about monogamy, celibacy, and Mother Teresa of Calcutta (implying that the venerable religious leader would be better off if she engaged in sexual relations). Public outcry intensified and many supporters of lesbian and gay inclusion joined in the outburst over Williams' statements. Bishop Spong reacted by demanding Williams' resignation from the directorship of *The Oasis*, a ministry for gay and lesbian persons in the Diocese of Newark, and prohibited the recently ordained Williams from functioning as a priest. The very next month, the Presiding Bishop and his

Council of Advice issued a statement reaffirming the 1979 resolution and disassociated themselves from the actions of Spong and Williams. The following September, the House of Bishops followed suit and narrowly supported a resolution for the disassociation of the House – and, therefore, the Church – from the ordination and subsequent actions of Williams.

At that same meeting of the Presiding Bishop's Council of Advice in January 1991, the bishops issued a statement which acknowledged the potential for systemic disruption of the Church over gay and lesbian ordination and the blessing of same-sex unions and called for further study. Defending themselves against a possible charge of abdicating their leadership by calling for continued dialogue, the bishops wrote:

we do not expect easy answers. Dialogue is not going to produce consensus. It may not even provide grounds for a compromise beyond our ken. But our prayerful hope is that it will provide greater understanding of the mind of Christ. . .we cannot carry out our ministry if we each simply assume that we already have the whole truth and nothing at all to learn. We call on you to share our recognition of the inherent faithlessness of a closed mind.¹⁰⁰

Further study was once again the order of the day.

This sentiment was echoed in *The Blue Book* for the 70th General Convention in the Report of the Standing Commission on Human Affairs, which concluded that since there was such a diversity of opinion on the issues of homosexuality, gay and lesbian ordination, and same-sex unions, further study was necessary. The report asked the General Convention to mandate discussion of the issues at the parish level. At that same

time that they recommended further study, the Commission also called on the Church to affirm and acknowledge the gay and lesbian sexuality as God-given, and asked the General Convention to direct the Standing Liturgical Commission to develop liturgies for same-sex unions.

In response to this report and some twenty other resolutions on human sexuality coming before the convention, David E. Johnson, the Bishop of Massachusetts, wrote to the members of the House of Bishops and urged them not to act on the resolutions, suggesting instead that they seek to fulfill their episcopal responsibilities as teachers and healers. Bishop Johnson believed that the current contentious nature of the debate over gay and lesbian ordination and same-sex unions, coupled with the furor being expressed in many quarters over holding General Convention in a state that did not honor Martin Luther King, would be disastrous for both the Church and for gay and lesbian people. His hope was that another triennium of discussion would allow the bishops to take up their episcopal responsibilities, and give the Church more time to consider the complex issues at hand. He asked the clergy and laity of the Episcopal Church to be mindful of their Baptismal Covenant: to proclaim the word and example of the Good News of God in Christ, to seek and serve Christ in all persons, and to strive for justice and peace and respect the dignity of every human being.¹⁰¹

Although several resolutions regarding human sexuality, gay and lesbian ordination, and the blessing of same-sex unions were debated at the General Convention

¹⁰⁰ Quoted from Charles Bennison, *Some Chronological Benchmarks in the History of Social and Ecclesiastical Opinion Regarding Sexuality and Marriage (Both Same- and Opposite-sex) in the Church and Society*, a paper published at the Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge MA, 24 June 1993, p. 22.

¹⁰¹ From a personal conversation with Bishop David E. Johnson, 21 April 1992.

of 1991, much of the anticipated acrimony had been temporarily diffused. Supporters and opponents of these issues returned to their dioceses for another triennium of discussion, prayer, and discernment.

Following the General Convention of 1991, many parishes in the Episcopal Church engaged in discussions about human sexuality. The results of these discussions have been difficult to assess as a result of the low rate of return to diocesan and national church offices. As the end of one triennium lead to the beginning of another, conservative bishops in the Episcopal Church began presentment proceedings against a number of bishops who had ordained openly gay and lesbian people to the priesthood. By the time of General Convention 1994, the Church was once again polarized over the issues of lesbian and gay ordination.

In an effort to defuse further controversy, acrimony, and dissension, the Presiding Bishop, the Council of Advice, and other Church leaders attempted to keep the questions of gay and lesbian ordination and same-sex unions from disrupting the 71st General Convention of 1994 in Indianapolis.¹⁰² Calling yet again for further prayer, study and consideration, they asked the dioceses and their delegations not to bring any more resolutions to the floor of the Convention. The phrase *sexual orientation* was added to the 'fit persons to be identified' clause of Title III, Canon 4.¹⁰³ The House of Bishops published a pamphlet called "Continuing the Dialogue" and asked that all members of the Church read it and use it to further dialogue and conversation.

¹⁰² The potential for acrimony had increased significantly just before General Convention when Bishop Ronald H. Haines of the Diocese of Washington, DC, ordained Elizabeth Carl to the priesthood on 5 June 1991. He went ahead with the ordination against the express wishes of the Presiding Bishop.

¹⁰³ See the *Journal of the 71st General Convention 1994*.

The call for continuing dialogue was not new to the 71st General Convention. At the 69th triennial gathering of 1988 in Detroit, resolution D-120s ‘strongly urge[d] each diocese and congregation to provide opportunities for open dialogue on human sexuality.’ In controversial Phoenix, resolution A-104sa ‘commission[ed] the bishops and members of each diocesan deputation to initiate means for all congregations in their jurisdiction to enter into dialogue and deepen their understanding of these complex issues’ and directed the president of each province to appoint one bishop, one clerical, and one lay deputy of the province to facilitate the process. Resolution D-049s called on the Church at large to ‘reexamine its attitudes about sexuality’ and requested all dioceses to have continuing education courses made available.

The resolution that set the 71st General Convention in Indianapolis apart from its predecessors was C-042a which directed the Standing Liturgical Commission and the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops to ‘prepare and present to the 72nd General Convention, as part of the Church’s ongoing dialogue on human sexuality, a report addressing the theological foundations and pastoral considerations involved in the development of rites honoring love and commitment between persons of the same sex.’ This resolution, along with C003s which was endorsed by the 72nd General Convention of 1994 in Philadelphia, and A065 which was presented by the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to the 73rd General Convention in Denver, are the subject of the rest of this analysis.

C. Prophecy, Expediency, or Showdown: General Convention Confronts the Issue of Same-Sex Rites

General Convention 1991

While the ordination and the civil and ecclesial rights of lesbian and gay people were primary issues at the General Conventions from 1976 to 1988, the question of same-sex unions has raised the level of discourse around human sexuality to new heights since 1991 when the Standing Commission on Human Affairs presented its report in *The Blue Book* for the 70th General Convention. Chaired by George N. Hunt III, Bishop of Rhode Island, the Commission recommended that the Standing Liturgical Commission study the theological and liturgical issues involved in affirming and blessing same-sex unions and begin the process of developing liturgical forms for such committed relationships. The report voiced the hope of the majority of the Commission that such rites would open the Church to the ordination of gay and lesbian people, thus negating the 1979 resolution on sexuality. Although this report would never reach the floor of the House of Bishops for debate and consideration, it served as a lightening rod for heated debate in the Church at large.

The two decades leading up to the 70th General Convention in Phoenix had been rife with controversy. The major issues that caused the most contention were the ordination of women, prayer book revision, and the rights of homosexuals. In the case of the ordination of women, the controversy began in the 1960s. Supporters argued that that

God could call women as well as men to Holy orders, positing that Jesus was fully human and that to deny the priesthood to women would be to deny their humanity. They further argued that the Episcopal Church was running the risk of denying the Holy Spirit and of ‘alienating large numbers of women who were potential communicants.’¹⁰⁴ Opponents argued that Scripture was clear about the distinction between male and female roles and the maleness of Jesus. Priests represented Jesus at the altar; since Jesus and the apostles were male, the apostolic succession must remain male. They also raised the specter of schism within the National Church, the collapse of ecumenical dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches, and strained relations with the rest of the Anglican Communion.

Exacerbating the tensions aroused by the conversation about the ordination of women was the issue of prayer book revision. In 1964, following the wave of liturgical reform begun by the Second Vatican Council, the 61st General Convention directed the Standing Commission on Liturgy to begin the process of prayer book revision. The commission submitted a series of trial use liturgies over the next four triennia that allowed parishes to experiment with and respond to the new rites. Proponents were enamored with the contemporary language, the scriptural emphasis, and the rediscovery of historic Christian liturgies with the emphasis on the Eucharist. Opponents decried the loss of the ‘comfortable words’ and ‘incomparable English’ of the 1928 Prayer Book. Citing the addition of gender-free language and prayers for social concerns as another sign that the liberals responsible for women’s ordination and social action initiatives were

¹⁰⁴ David L. Holmes, *A Brief History of the Episcopal Church*, (Valley Forge 1993), p. 167.

now forcing their views on the worship life of the Church, conservative and traditional elements raised the specter of schism.

The threat of schism has also been an enduring theme of the debates on human sexuality and the place of homosexuals in the life of the Episcopal Church. These issues have provided the initial impetus for controversy and vitriol on both sides of the debate. The question of providing rites of blessing for same-sex unions has reinvigorated the conservative and traditionalist factions who claim that the creation of such liturgies would be the final wedge needed to irrevocably split the Episcopal Church.

The atmosphere of the Church in the months leading up to the convention in Phoenix was permeated with anxiety and contention. As noted earlier, the selection of Phoenix for the sight of the 70th General Convention was vigorously opposed by Episcopalians who felt that it was inappropriate to hold the triennial meeting in a state that did not recognize Martin Luther King Day. The House of Bishops had voted, albeit by a narrow margin, to ‘disassociate’ itself from the ordination of Robert Williams at its meeting in September 1990. The debate around the ordination of gay and lesbian people was refueled by the ordinations of Elizabeth Carl and Barry Stopfel. Carl, a lesbian, was ordained to the diaconate on 5 June 1990 by the Bishop of Washington, Ronald H. Haines. This ordination is particularly striking because Haines went ahead with the Carl ordination in direct contradiction to the wishes of the Presiding Bishop, Edmund Lee Browning, who had asked the Washington diocesan to delay the ordination until after Phoenix. Stopfel, an openly gay man in a committed relationship, was ordained to the diaconate by Walter C. Righter, retired Bishop of Iowa and assistant bishop in the

Diocese of Newark on 30 September 1990. This ordination is also striking because the Presiding Bishop had asked Bishop Spong to delay the ordination until after the House of Bishops met that same September. Spong, hoping to deflect media attention following the vote of the bishops to disassociate from the Williams ordination, then asked his assisting bishop, Righter, to ordain Stopfel. Thus was the stage set for General Convention 1991.

So contentious was the general atmosphere of 70th General Convention that Presiding Bishop Edmund Browning would later comment that he was ‘not sure that we could hold together as a church.’¹⁰⁵ Liberals and conservatives in both houses vilified one another at every turn; legislation sponsored by either side was either voted down or never discussed. The report of the Standing Commission on Human Affairs – which called in part for the development of rites for same-sex unions – never made it to the floors of either house for debate. An amendment written by Bishop William Frey, retired diocesan of Colorado and dean of Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry, and John Howe, Bishop of Central Florida, calling for clergy to abstain from sexual intercourse outside of marriage¹⁰⁶, failed in the House of Bishops by a vote of eighty-five to ninety-one. In the spirit of compromise, General Convention did pass A-194sa which affirmed that physical sexual expression was only appropriate within the lifelong, monogamous union of husband and wife and that the Church would continue to work to reconcile the discontinuity between this teaching and the experience of many of its members.

¹⁰⁵ From his speech to the Joint Session of the House of deputies and the House of Bishops during the 71st General Convention in Philadelphia, 18 June 1997. Quoted in Robert Prichard, *A History of the Episcopal Church*, revised edition, (Harrisburg 1999), p. 290.

¹⁰⁶ Walter Righter spoke for many when he described this proposed canon as an attempt to canonically prohibit the ordination of gay and lesbian people ‘unless they took a vow of celibacy.’ See Walter C. Righter, *A Pilgrim’s Way*, (New York 1998), p. 45.

Resolution A-104sa also went on to say that ‘this General Convention confesses our failure to lead and resolve this discontinuity through legislative efforts based upon resolutions directed at singular and various aspects of these issues.’¹⁰⁷ It also reiterated the call of resolution D-120s of the 69th General Convention in Detroit, 1988, for each diocese and congregation to provide opportunities for open dialogue on human sexuality; as previously noted, it ‘commissioned’ and ‘directed’ provinces and diocese to facilitate the dialogue process. As we shall see, this call for dialogue would become an enduring theme of General Convention.

In the wake of the contentious convention in Phoenix, the Church took some steps toward quelling the storm: the House of Bishops met in 1992 in what would become a regular non-legislative retreat at the Kanuga Conference Center in North Carolina. These retreats focussed on bible study, meditation, and informal conversation designed to bring a spirit of collegiality to the House. A symposium entitled **Shaping Our Future** was held in 1993 to consider the ways in which the Church could alter its structure to reduce conflict and refocus on mission.¹⁰⁸ The event drew over 1000 people and discussed a number of innovative ideas which resulted in the consolidation and streamlining of a number of interim bodies.

¹⁰⁷ *Journal of the 70th General Convention 1990*.

¹⁰⁸ The work of this symposium was reported in *Shaping Our Future: Challenges for the Church in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by J. Stephen Freeman, (Cambridge 1994).

General Convention 1994

When the 71st General Convention met in Indianapolis in 1994, tempers seemed to be less heated but a spirit of contention was very much present as the Episcopal Church considered yet another round of resolutions concerning human sexuality and the rights of lesbian and gay people in the Church. Five significant pieces of legislation were considered: B1001 *Pastoral Study Document on Sexuality*; D007 *Amend Title III, Canon 4 – Equal Access to the Ordination Process*; C026 *Address Youth Suicide and Conflicts Over Sexuality*; D006 *Call on US Government to Extend Benefits to Gay and Lesbian Couples*; and C042 *Prepare Report Considering Rites for Same-Sex Commitments*. The House of Bishops also considered and adopted a change to the canon for the number of votes required to proceed with a heresy trial, changing from the requirement from two-thirds to twenty-five percent of the House needed to institute such a trial.¹⁰⁹

Two other items pursuant to sexuality issues were also discussed: *The Province VII Statement – An Affirmation in Response to the Proposed Pastoral of the House of Bishops Concerning Sexuality* and *The Koinonia Statement*. The former was the work of conservative bishops and the latter a response by moderate and liberal members of the House. While neither had the force of resolution or canon, they were, and continue to be, representative of the depth and breadth of the discourse around human sexuality. The statement produced by the Province VII bishops was a response to one of the drafts of the then as yet released report on sexuality by a special committee of bishops, clergy, and lay

people commissioned by the previous General Convention. At some point prior to its publication, it appears that conservative factions secured a copy of one the drafts and responded to it via the *Province VII Statement*. The content of this statement can be summed up in this passage: ‘The fundamental element in Christian morality is the discipline of self-control called Chastity, which means absolute faithfulness in marriage and sexual abstinence apart from marriage.’¹¹⁰ In response to this document, John Spong, Bishop of Newark, wrote and circulated *The Koinonia Statement*. This document can be summed up in the passage: ‘We believe that homosexuality and heterosexuality are morally neutral, that both can be lived out with beauty, honor, holiness, and integrity and that both are capable of being lived out destructively.’¹¹¹ The statement from Province VII was signed by 101 bishops and the Spong statement was signed by 71 members of the House of Bishops.

Louis Crew, senior deputy from the Diocese of Newark, was quick to note three things: The bishops who signed *The Koinonia Statement* were from dioceses with a total of 967,097 communicants; the bishops who signed *The Province VII Statement* were from dioceses with 645,827 communicants; and that those bishops who signed neither were from diocese with a total of 833,126 communicants. Crew writes: ‘Those who endorsed Bishop Spong’s statement are not marginal: they oversee 40 percent of all Episcopalians. They also serve areas 5 percent more heavily populated than the areas

¹⁰⁹ Righter, in *A Pilgrim’s Way*, notes that ‘looking back, one can see the possibility of plan being hatched. By reducing the number of votes necessary, it would be much easier to get a trial.’ p. 47. Righter would be brought up on heresy charges in 1995.

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Righter, p. 50.

¹¹¹ Quoted in Righter, p. 50.

served by those who signed the Province 7 document.’¹¹² Those bishops who signed the Spong document hailed from predominantly urban areas where gay and lesbian people tend to live. This was viewed as a positive development by supporters of lesbian and gay inclusion in the Church. Similarly, the number of signatures on the statement sponsored by Province VII was regarded as a moral victory by its supporters.

Although the Church was no closer to resolving the issues around human sexuality by the end of the 71st General Convention, its debate of resolution C042 was a moral victory for gays, lesbians, and their supporters. Originating in the House of Bishops and concurred by the House of Deputies, C042 directed the Standing Liturgical Commission and the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops to ‘prepare and present to the 72nd General Convention, as part of the Church’s ongoing dialogue on human sexuality, a report addressing the theological foundations and pastoral considerations involved in the development of rites honoring love and commitment between persons of the same-sex.’¹¹³ Passage of this resolution marked the first time that General Convention would introduce and concur on a resolution calling for the development of same-sex rites. It should be noted that the resolution called for ‘rites *honoring* [italics added] love and commitment,’ and not rites *blessing* of these relationships.

The call for same-sex rites was not a new phenomenon in the Church *per se*. While it is the case that the issue came before General Convention for the first time in 1994, lesbian and gay people and their supporters have engaged the conversation – and

¹¹² Quoted in Righter, p. 52.

the Church in that conversation – in particular earnestness since the passage of A-53s in 1979. As noted previously, since this resolution stated clearly that it was inappropriate to ordain ‘a practicing homosexual, or any person who is engaged in heterosexual relations outside of marriage,’ a number of assumptions and questions were raised regarding our theological understanding of relationships, sexuality, and marriage. These assumptions and questions have been discussed in a variety of settings and in diverse ways over the years. For example, in 1989, the Commission on Human Sexuality in the Diocese of Massachusetts issued a four-page report¹¹⁴ to its diocesan convention condemning the 1979 resolution as ‘flawed’ and endorsing the blessing of same-sex relationships; in 1993, the Parish Commission on the Solemnization of Relationships¹¹⁵ from St. Barnabas Episcopal Church in Denver, Colorado, issued a 31 page report to its vestry and clergy detailing theological and sacramental reasons for blessing same-sex unions; also in 1993, the Episcopal Divinity School initiated a symposium entitled **Consultation on the Blessing of Gay and Lesbian Marriages**¹¹⁶ which explored theological, liturgical, and ecclesiological foundations for the development of same-sex blessings. By the time that the 72nd General Convention met at Philadelphia in 1997, All Saints Episcopal Church in Pasadena, California had founded **Beyond Inclusion**¹¹⁷, a nation- and Church-wide

¹¹³ *Journal of the 71st General Convention 1994.*

¹¹⁴ Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, Diocesan Commission on Human Sexuality, *Interim Report to Diocesan Convention*, 25 October 1989.

¹¹⁵ St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Parish Commission on the Solemnization of Relationships, *A Report to the Vestry and Clergy*, 8 February 1993.

¹¹⁶ Held 8-10 July 1993.

¹¹⁷ A ministry of All Saints, Pasadena CA, **Beyond Inclusion** was founded in response to the presentment charges brought against Bishop Walter Righter in 1995.

educational organization dedicated to the full-inclusion of gay and lesbian people in the Episcopal Church and society at large.

General Convention 1997

The 72nd General Convention considered six major resolutions about human sexuality: A032 *On the Topic of the Norms of Sexual Conduct*, A071 *Commend and Urge Continuing Dialogue on Questions of Sexuality*, B032 *Endorse the Kuala Lumpur Statement on Human Sexuality*; C002 *On the Topic of Rites for the Blessing of Same-Sex Relationships*; C003 *Affirm Traditional Marriage and Request Study of Same-Sex Relationships*; and D011 *Apologize for the Church's Rejection of Gays and Lesbians*. Resolution A032, authored by the Executive Council, called for the Church to support norms of sexual conduct and was rejected when it died with adjournment. Resolution A071, authored by the Committee for Dialogue on Human Sexuality, commended continued debate and the avoidance of confrontation and polarization, was concurred. Resolutions B032 and C002 were the subjects of particularly emotional debates that we will discuss in the next paragraphs. Resolution C003, authored by the Diocese of Missouri, affirmed the 'sacredness' of Christian Marriage and called on the Standing Liturgical Commission to continue to study the theological aspects of same-sex unions, was concurred. Resolution D011, authored by Edgar "Kim" Byham, called for the Episcopal Church to apologize to gay and lesbian people for its years of rejection and maltreatment, was also concurred.

The debates on resolutions B032 and C002 were emotionally charged. The former called for the Church to endorse the *Kuala Lumpur Statement* issued by the Second Anglican Encounter in the South, a meeting of bishops from two-thirds world provinces, held in February 1997. The latter called for the 72nd General Convention to direct the SLC to develop rites for blessing same-sex unions for inclusion into the *Book of Occasional Services (BOS)*.

Similar in theology to *The Province VII Statement*, the *Kuala Lumpur Statement* outlines the scriptural and traditional teachings upheld by conservative elements across the Anglican Communion. Because it is representative of previous and future statements made by the so-called ‘right wing’ of the Church, it is printed here in its entirety:

The Standing Committee of the Province of South East Asia do hereby unanimously resolve:

1. To adopt and endorse the ‘Statement on Human Sexuality’ unanimously passed by the 2nd Anglican Encounter held at Kuala Lumpur from 10 to 15 February 1997 and append hereto.
2. That this Province supports and be in communion with that part of the Anglican Communion which accepts and endorses the principles aforesaid and not otherwise.

Statement on Human Sexuality

(2nd Anglican Encounter in the South, 10 to 15 February 1997)

1. God’s glory and loving purposes have been revealed in the creation of humankind (Rom. 1:18; Gen. 1:36, 27). Among the multiplicity of his gifts we are blessed with our sexuality.
2. Since the Fall (Gen. 3), life has been impaired and God’s purposes spoilt. Our fallen state has affected every sphere of our being, which includes our sexuality. Sexual deviation has existed in every time and in most cultures. Jesus’ teaching about lust in the Sermon on the Mount

(Matt. 5:27-30) makes it clear that sexual sin is a real danger and temptation to us all.

3. It is, therefore, with an awareness of our own vulnerability to sexual sin that we express our profound concern about recent developments relating to Church discipline and moral teaching in some provinces in the North – specifically, the ordination of practicing homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex unions.

4. While acknowledging the complexities of our sexual nature and the strong drives it places within us, we are quite clear about God's will in this area which is expressed in the Bible.

5. The Scripture bears witness to God's will regarding human sexuality which is to be expressed only within the life long union of a man and a woman in (holy) matrimony.

6. The Holy Scriptures are clear in teaching that all sexual promiscuity is sin. We are convinced that this includes homosexual practices between men or women, as well as heterosexual relationships outside marriage.

7. We believe that the clear and unambiguous teaching of the Holy Scriptures about human sexuality is of great help to Christians as it provides clear boundaries.

8. We find no conflict between clear biblical teaching and sensitive pastoral care. Repentance precedes forgiveness and is part of the healing process. To heal spiritual wounds in God's name we need his wisdom and truth. We see this in the ministry of Jesus, for example his response to the adulterous woman, '...neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.' (John 8:11)

9. We encourage the Church to care for all those who are trapped in their sexual brokenness and to become the channel of Christ's compassion and love towards them. We wish to stand alongside and welcome them into a process of being whole and restored within our communities of faith. We would also affirm and resource those who exercise a pastoral ministry in this area.

10. We are deeply concerned that the setting aside of biblical teaching in such actions as the ordination of practicing homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex unions calls into question the authority of the Holy Scriptures. This is totally unacceptable to us.

11. This leads us to express concern about mutual accountability and interdependence within our Anglican Communion. As provinces and dioceses, we need to learn how to seek each other's counsel and wisdom in a spirit of true unity, and to reach a common mind before embarking on radical changes to Church discipline and moral teaching.

12. We live in a global village and must be more aware that the way we act in one part of the world can radically affect the mission and witness of the Church in another.¹¹⁸

Resolution B032 was authored by the Bishop George Edward Haynsworth and sent to the House of Deputies by the Committee on Social and Urban Affairs. The Deputies voted by voice to refer this document to an interim body for study and consideration. After heated debate on a motion by Bishop Dickson to adopt rather than refer B032, the House of Bishops strongly defeated the motion in a roll-call vote, then voted to refer the resolution to an interim body.

Resolution C002, authored by the Diocese of Pennsylvania, was also the subject of heated debate. This resolution called on General Convention to direct the SLC to develop ‘after critical study of pertinent rites already in use by faith communities, a rite or rites for the blessing of committed relationships between persons of the same sex.’ for inclusion into the *BOS*. When it came to the floor of the House of Deputies, they initially debated and passed an amendment from the Committee on Urban and Social Affairs that called for the insertion of the phrase ‘while affirming the sacredness of Christian Marriage between one man and one woman with the intent of a lifelong relationship.’ Following more debate, a roll-call vote was taken and C002 failed to receive the necessary two-thirds majority from each order, and was defeated by one vote each in the lay and clerical orders.

¹¹⁸ The text of this document was copied from *Louis Crew’s Anglican Pages* on the World Wide Web. It can also be found in the *Journal of the 72nd General Convention 1994*.

Interestingly – and confusingly – this same triennial passed C003s, a resolution first debated in the House of Bishops. C003s was a re-working or substitute of C002 that the Deputies had narrowly defeated. The critical difference was that C003s called for further study and did not include a call to insert same-sex rites into the *Book of Occasional Services*. This resolution directed the Standing Liturgical Commission to study the ‘theological aspects of committed relationships of same-sex couples, and to issue a full report including recommendations of future steps for the resolution of issues related to such committed relationships’ for consideration at the 73rd General Convention to be held in Denver in 2000. The bishops passed C003s and sent the resolution back to the deputies where it was concurred. Passage of this resolution laid the foundation for the work of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music (SCLM)¹¹⁹ for the interim between the 72nd and 73rd conventions.

¹¹⁹ This is the new name of the commission formerly known as the SLC

General Convention 2000

When a topic has been discussed for twenty-some years, it's hard to come up with anything new.

Committee 25 Co-chair Rebecca Snow, Deputy from Alaska

In its report, *Theological Aspects of Committed Relationships of Same-Sex Couples: Report of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music Prepared in Response to Resolution C003s of the 72nd General Convention Meeting in Philadelphia in 1997 for Discussion at the 73rd General Convention Meeting in Denver in 2000*¹²⁰, the SCLM acknowledged that for nearly twenty-five years, the Episcopal Church

has chosen to keep before its General Convention the issue of the homosexuality of some of its members, and the extent to which those members are fully part of this Church. For some, this has represented the threat of a compromised Christianity conformed to the prevailing culture and for others it has signaled, even if not yet offering, the hope of an authentic Christian life without the denial of what they experience as a fundamental fact of their lives. There has been passion on both sides of the issue, as well as pain. There have been studies that have been read one way by one group and interpreted differently by the other. There has been prejudice, misinformation and a lack of Christian charity.¹²¹

This statement, especially the last sentence, captures the essence of the depth and breadth of the Church's dialogue on human sexuality.

The response of the Church to this dialogue has been varied. For many lesbian and gay people and their supporters, the dialogue has gone on for far too long; they feel

¹²⁰ For the entire text of the SCLM's report see *The Blue Book: Reports of Committees, Commissions, Boards and Agencies of The General Convention of the Episcopal Church Seventy-third General Convention, Denver, Colorado, July 2000*, pp. 205-232.

that the time has come for the Church to officially recognize the ordination of non-celibate homosexual people and bless same-sex-unions. Others, most notably conservative and traditionalist factions, point to the 1998 Lambeth Conference resolution declaring sexual expression by gays and lesbians ‘to be incompatible with Scripture’ as the appropriate policy for the Episcopal Church; emboldened by Lambeth, these groups have enlisted the support of other Anglican conservative groups and bishops to press for a more traditional understanding of doctrine and interpretation.¹²²

The pages of numerous publications in both print and electronic media affiliated with the Episcopal Church – officially and unofficially – were filled with articles, editorials, opinion pieces, and letters to the editors arguing pro and con about homosexuality in general and the SCLM report in particular, during the months and weeks leading up to the 73rd General Convention in Denver. Covering the gamut of issues from those raised at Lambeth to the concerns for the Church to be discussed in Denver, these articles, editorials, opinions, and letters say a great deal about the diversity and unity of opinion in the Church at large, as well as the hopes and fears of the same.

The **Anglican Voice**, the online magazine of Episcopalians United posted two articles about the 26 February meeting of the Bishops’ Advisory Council of the American Anglican Council (AAC). The first posting printed the AAC bishops’ statement:

Despite real threats of serious division within the Episcopal Church, we, the bishops affiliated with the American Anglican Council (AAC), believe we are in a moment of significant missionary opportunity.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 205-206.

¹²² See the pre-convention press release by David Skidmore, “*General Convention will deal with sexuality issues – again,*” ENS 2000-098, 25 March 2000.

We are unanimous in our embrace of the reports and resolutions of the 1998 Lambeth Conference. We believe Lambeth's teaching is authoritative for Anglican Christians and the clear starting point for a new era of mission in the 21st century. The refusal of some to embrace such teaching as guided by the Holy Spirit in a Council of the Church not only diminishes but seriously threatens both the unity and mission of the Episcopal Church and the entire Anglican Communion.

Our vision for the Episcopal Church. . . is rooted in the Great Commission of the Risen Christ to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). It is embodied in the church as a community of believers living in one accord with God's word in love and truth. We are not an independent denomination, but we are members of the Anglican Communion whose local franchise in the United States of America is the Episcopal Church.

We recognize that fulfilling our vision entails profound and radical consequences for the structures of the Church. Form will follow function, or dysfunction, and will reflect either choice. Embracing the great Commission as a context for our life as a Church will inevitably have far-reaching consequences that are observable in specific realignments of structures not only in ECUSA but also throughout the Anglican Communion.

We are aware of recent petitions for emergency intervention in ECUSA, delivered to the Primates and bishops of the Anglican Communion from the 'Association of Anglican Congregations on mission' (AACOM). These petitions signal some troubling realities. They reveal – and may understate – the post-Lambeth condition of the American Province, ECUSA. They may well represent the leading edge of an impending realignment in the Anglican Communion, and serve to emphasize the serious divisions within the Episcopal Church, as evidenced by the almost immediate repudiations of Lambeth resolutions and significant misrepresentation of bishops from other Provinces of the Communion.

If we are to avoid serious schism, then Christ's Great Commission must ground our vision. Any other foundation will force division in the Church. We believe that we are in the midst of an authentic reformation of the Church. In such circumstances, profoundly different opinions are bound to lead to conflict. Therefore we request our Presiding Bishop to promote the kind of community that resists the use of force, the one against the other, and to establish a principle of providing creative alternatives in situations where there is serious disagreement between a bishop and that bishop's clergy or congregations.

We offer this statement in the sincere and abiding commitment to the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in whose name believers are redeemed to eternal life.¹²³

Issued less than a week before the House of Bishops convened for one of their semi-annual meetings, the statement from the AAC bishops was designed to capture attention.

The AAC statement was followed by a news analysis by the editor of the **Anglican Voice**. This story detailed some of the significant events of the meeting where the statement was crafted. The article noted the roles of the Rev'd Charles H. Murphy III, of the *First Promise* movement, the Rev'd Dr. John H. Rodgers, retired dean of Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry, and Stephen Noll, an AAC board member from the faculty of Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry. Where Murphy spoke repeatedly about 'realignment and a tear in the fabric of Anglicanism, Rodgers and Noll urged the bishops to declare broken communion and seek alternative episcopal oversight. Within a year, Murphy and Rodgers would be the subjects of broad Church media attention following their controversial consecrations in Singapore as missionary bishops. As we shall see, these consecrations would cause more than a few ripples in the days leading up to and following the General Convention in Denver.

The **Episcopal News Service (ENS)** released a series of articles on 11 March 1999 about the continuing dialogue around homosexuality in the Anglican Communion. The first release, "*Bishops determined to help General Convention deal with divisive issues,*" described the outcome of the House of Bishops' meeting of 4-9 March at Camp

¹²³ Reprinted from the **Anglican Voice**, **The online magazine of Episcopalians United**, March 1999. The follow-up article, written by Doug LeBlanc, appeared a few days after the meeting. This web page can be accessed through www.anglicanvoice.org.

Allen in Texas. The second release was a copy of Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold's response to the 26 February 1999 letter from six active primates and one retired primate that voiced their concerns about how the American Church was dealing with sexuality issues following the 1998 Lambeth Conference. The third release, "*Griswold responds to international church leaders on sexuality issues*," was an ENS analysis of the letter exchange.

The report about the Camp Allen meeting focused on the bishops' desire to help the Church deal more constructively with divisive issues that threaten to split the Church. It quoted the Presiding Bishop as saying that there "are concerns that do not lend themselves to a vote. We learned from Lambeth that passing resolutions doesn't resolve the issue." Claude Payne, Bishop of Texas, was also quoted as saying that "even though we did not vote on it here, the sense was that we will not vote up or down on the hot button sexuality issues at the General Convention in 2000." This report prompted an immediate response from Dr. Pamela Chinnis, President of the House of Deputies, in her spring letter to the deputies:

Some stories have given the impression that the bishops made a unilateral decision that the next General Convention would not vote on 'certain divisive issues' (presumably these issues have to do with sexuality and implementing the canons regarding ordained women). Some of these reports may have been exaggerated, but I don't need to remind Deputies that Bishops cannot make decisions for our House, as we cannot make decisions for theirs. It is unfortunate that some accounts gave the impression that all the bishops had reached an agreement about what could or could not be considered in Denver.

Regardless of how it was received by the Church at large, the Camp Allen report did note that the bishops were now challenged to bring a spirit of cooperation back to their dioceses and on to General Convention.

In his response to the letter from the Anglican primates, Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold emphasized the ‘divergent opinions on the question of homosexuality’ in many provinces of the Anglican Communion. Both the letter and the ENS report focused on the ongoing process of discernment and conversation about homosexuality, and invited the primates to visit those parts of the Episcopal Church that caused them concern. “Such visits will afford you the opportunity not only to query some of our bishops and representatives of their dioceses but also to listen to the experience of homosexual persons, which is mandated by the Lambeth resolution on homosexuality.”

In an editorial entitled “*Some Hopeful Discussions*,” the editors of **The Living Church**, ‘an independent weekly serving Episcopalians,’ noted in its 12 December 1999 issue that

[quietly], with little or no publicity, groups of Episcopalians and other Anglicans have been meeting to discuss what should prove to be the most important issue to come before next year’s General Convention – homosexuality.

Despite the determination of the House of Bishops to keep controversial issues off the floor of convention, it would appear as though groups at both ends of the theological spectrum will try to ensure that legislation on this topic will be presented. In the meantime, following up on the controversial resolution of the Lambeth Conference last year, discussions are being held on various levels.

One of the most interesting took place at Holy Cross Monastery in West Park, N.Y., where 10 bishops, three of them primates, gathered at the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The bishops pledged themselves to confidentiality, but one can imagine that the location of the

monastery, on a hill overlooking the Hudson River, provided a pastoral setting for dialogue.

At the other end of the country a group of Episcopalians who might be described as coming from the far left and the far right theologically, met to discuss reconciliation. While it's doubtful that anyone's mind was changed, it's likely that the participants emerged from that gathering with respect for persons whose beliefs differed greatly.

Two other meetings are worth noting. Some Anglican primates from the Third World along with observers from various organizations, met in Kampala, Uganda, to discuss further how conservative Anglicans could respond to the more liberal leanings of most of the Episcopal Church. This follows a tour of several dioceses by a group of foreign bishops, who engaged in dialogue with persons who favor the ordination of non-celibate homosexual persons and the blessing of committed same-sex relationships and those who oppose them.

The editorial concluded with the editors' noting that it was encouraging to see Church leaders willing to engage in conversations with those who do not agree with them. They also posited the belief that these discussions would help Episcopalians better understand one another when the issues were finally engaged at General Convention, and expressed their desire to have deputies and parish leaders engage in similar conversations.

As the time drew closer to the 73rd General Convention, and articles, editorials, opinion pieces, and letters to the editors in various church media outlets intensified, concerned members of the Episcopal Church – from all sides of the debate – began to come together in an attempt to find common ground upon which to continue the dialogue and seek reconciliation. One of the first such meetings took place at St. Alban's Parish in Edmonds, Washington, on 8-11 November 1999. Twenty-two lay and clergy leaders, including bishops, representing conservative, moderate, and liberal positions in the Church came together to explore the question: Who am I and what does Jesus mean to me? In answering this question, they began to share their perspectives on the conflicts in the Episcopal Church that center around such issues as the uniqueness of Jesus, the

approach and interpretation of the bible, abortion, and the blessing of same-sex unions. They discovered a common Christ-centered piety among themselves and deconstructed the myths on all sides that result in the kinds of stereotyping and demonization of the 'other' that has been prevalent in the Church. Conversation among the groups were at times painful, awkward, candid, and sobering; feelings of anger, mistrust, marginalization, and victimization were vented by liberal and conservative alike. One participant, the Rev'd Brian Cox, also one of the organizers of the event, noted that

[by] Wednesday afternoon it was so painful I felt in total despair in terms of any hope of reconciliation in the Episcopal Church. The differences seemed too deep and too profound. Yet, that evening the Holy Spirit broke through and brought us to a new depth of understanding and respect for each other.

This experience allowed the group to move from defending their different positions to exploring the things that united them. By the final morning, most participants were cautiously optimistic that reconciliation was possible if conservatives and liberals were prepared to treat each other's fears, concerns, and interests as legitimate. Stephen Noll of Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry noted that the reconciliation process calls upon liberals to be willing to let the present formularies and liturgies stand and to allow conservatives their sense of Godly conscience, and for conservatives to be willing to live in a radically pluralistic church without continually acting and speaking defensively.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Paraphrased from "*The Seattle 22: Report on an ECUSA Reconciliation Initiative*," in *Voice of Integrity*, Spring 2000, pp. 11-13.

This gathering resulted in the formation of the **New Commandment Task Force**, a group dedicated to the promotion of reconciliation in the Episcopal Church. The first official conference was held 15-19 May 2000 at Christ Church in Short Hills, New Jersey. Acknowledging the divisions in the Church on the blessing of same-sex unions, the ordination of non-celibate gay and lesbian people, and alternative episcopal oversight, participants identified six key points of agreement:

1. That in prayer we could experience deep love for each other in Jesus;
2. That in honest conversation we could overcome negative stereotypes based on lack of knowledge or misinformation about each other;
3. That there are some matters about which we could not reach agreement;
4. That we all fervently desire that conservatives, evangelicals, anglo-catholics, and liberals alike remain in our church;
5. That we long for an Episcopal Church which is comprehensive for the sake of truth;
6. That, by the grace of God and in the power of the Holy Spirit we will do all we can to work in a reconciling spirit for the good of the church.

Participants also agreed that some actions of the church such as Prayer Book revision, the ordination of women, the Lambeth resolution on sexuality, and the Singapore consecrations were continuing sources of conflict and disagreement. They also affirmed that an important part of the mission of the Episcopal Church is the reconciliation of all persons to God and each other through Jesus Christ.¹²⁵

The consecrations of Charles H. Murphy, head of **First Promise**, a network of conservative Episcopalians, and rector of All Saints Church in Pawleys Island, South Carolina, and John H. Rodgers, dean emeritus of Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry,

¹²⁵ Paraphrase from “*New Commandment Task Force Regional Meeting*,” **Voice of Integrity**, Summer 2000, pp. 13-14.

by a group of conservative primates in Singapore on 29 January 2000, prompted outspoken and colorful responses from all corners of the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion. Voices as varied as Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold, George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Peers, Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Canada, Australian Primate Peter Carnley, and Harry Goodhew, Archbishop of Sidney, were the first to condemn the 'irregular' consecrations. Griswold, in a letter to all American bishops and the 37 other primates of the Anglican Communion, wrote

I am appalled by this irregular action and even more so by the purported 'crisis' that has been largely fomented by them and others. . . They were not elected and their consecrations did not follow a canonical process. They are highly irregular and outside all acceptable norms.¹²⁶

The Archbishop of Canterbury noted that the consecrations 'were irresponsible and irregular and only harm the unity of the communion.' Archbishop Peers offered the most colorful observation:

Bishops are not intercontinental ballistic missiles, manufactured on one continent and fired into another as an act of aggression. [He called the consecrations] an open and premeditated assault on Anglican tradition, catholic order and Christian charity.¹²⁷

Carnley described the action as 'wicked.' Goodhew, joined by the primates of Tanzania and the Southern Cone, said that they were sorry to see that their colleagues 'felt compelled to take this present action on their own initiative and contrary to what was

¹²⁶ Quoted in *The Episcopal Times*, Volume 23, No. 3, March 2000, p. 8, from an article by Kathryn McCormack and James Solheim of the *Episcopal News Service*.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

agreed' in a meeting of conservative primates in Kampala a short time before the action in Singapore.

The consecrations of Murphy and Rodgers served to renew and refuel the heated discourse around the issues of sexuality, in general, and same-sex unions, in particular, along with the report of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music and the decision of the Vermont Supreme Court to extend marriage benefits to same-sex couples. The **Voice of Integrity** published an article by noted feminist theologian Eleanor McLaughlin entitled "*Why is Same-Sex Marriage such a Hot Button?*" in its Spring 2000 issue. The **Episcopal News Service** listed a news brief on their web site under the title "*Religion provides little guidance on gay marriage*" in May 2000. The **American Anglican Council**, energized by Singapore, responded to these events with the publication of *Mixed Blessings: why same-sex unions will divide the church; A Response to the Report and Resolution of the Episcopal Church's Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music*. Released in July at General Convention these ten essays, described in the introduction as a 'positive statement of the Church's teaching on human sexuality for the new millennium,' mixes direct criticism of the SCLM's report with articles about Lambeth, Vermont civil union legislation, a brief history of how Anglican primates have engaged sexuality issues, and a testimony of 'sexual healing and restoration.'

The debates and conversations were not limited to media outlets and major publications. Numerous dioceses addressed the issues at their conventions from 1997 to 2000. The dioceses of El Camino Real, Hawaii, Michigan, Minnesota, Newark, New York, Ohio, and others affirmed the life, witness, and ministry of gay and lesbian

members in diocesan resolutions. The Diocese of Colorado rejected a resolution to admonish any of its clergy who participated in same-sex blessings, and the Diocese of Minnesota guaranteed access to all of the Church's sacraments – including ordination and blessing of relationships – to lesbian and gay people. Other dioceses endorsed the Cambridge Accord, authored by Bishop Stephen Charleston, president and dean of the Episcopal Divinity School, which in part asserts that 'no homosexual person should be deprived of liberty, personal property, or civil rights because of sexual orientation.' Other dioceses, including Fort Worth passed resolutions supporting Lambeth and traditional interpretations of scripture and doctrine about sexual morality. The Diocese of Texas decided to refer sensitive and controversial resolutions to an executive board task force, a move endorsed by Bishop Claude Payne, who holds orthodox views on human sexuality and opposes ordination and blessings for gay and lesbian people, and who favors non-legislative processes for dealing with divisive issues. Conservative groups and bishops, emboldened by both Lambeth and the Singapore consecrations called for cooperation among one another in order to press the Church for a more traditional understanding of doctrine and scripture on sexuality issues, and a number of disaffected congregations began to break ties with the Episcopal Church or have sought alternative episcopal oversight.

Such was the atmosphere of the Episcopal Church in the days immediately prior to General Convention in Denver.

Two weeks before General Convention began, Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold, under General Rule I of the House of Bishops, decided to appoint a special legislative committee that would handle all resolutions concerning matters of human sexuality. Under Rule IV. 8 of the House of Deputies, Dr. Pamela Chinnis, President of the House of Deputies appointed a corresponding special committee. The formation of Special Committee 25 – also known as the Committee on the Church and Human Sexuality and composed of six bishops and six deputies – was initially prompted by the Church-wide response to Resolution A065 from the Report of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music. Referring this resolution to a special legislative committee prompted the decision to refer related resolutions as well, despite the fact that at previous conventions similar resolutions were handled by Legislative Committee 10, Social and Urban Affairs.¹²⁸

The bishops named to what came to be familiarly known as Committee 25 were Arthur Williams, chair and Bishop Suffragan of Ohio; John Howe, Bishop of Central Florida; John Lipscomb, Bishop of Southwest Florida; James Krotz, Bishop of Nebraska; Catherine Waynick, Bishop of Indianapolis; and Edwin Gulick, Bishop of Kentucky. Deputies appointed were: Rebecca Snow, chair and lay deputy from Alaska; J.P Causey, Jr., lay deputy from Virginia; Sterling Newell, Jr., lay deputy from Ohio; the Very Rev'd Michael Barlowe, clerical deputy from Iowa; the Rev'd Bonnie Perry, clerical deputy from Chicago; and the Rev'd Barnum McCarty, clerical deputy from Florida.

¹²⁸ See the memo entitled "*Formation of a Special Legislative Committee*" from the Rev'd Rosemary Sullivan, Secretary of the General Convention, posted on the Episcopal Church, USA – Office of the General Convention web site posted on 6 June 2000. Resolution A065 was originally referred to Committee 13, Prayer Book, Liturgy & Music.

The original resolutions sent to Committee 25 were: A009 *Homosexuality: Identification of ‘Safe Spaces,’* proposed by the Commission on Anglican & International Peace with Justice Concerns; A065 *Homosexuality: Resolution on Issues Related to Committed Same-Sex Relationships*, proposed by the SCLM; B008 *Justice: Presentation on the Sin of Heterosexism*, proposed by Charles E. Bennison, Bishop of Pennsylvania; C008 *Human Sexuality: Continued Dialogue on Gay & Lesbian Relationships*, proposed by the Diocese of Maine; C023 *Liturgy: Request Development of Rites for Blessing Same-Sex Gender Relationships*, proposed by the Diocese of El Camino Real; C031 *Homosexuality: Boy Scouts of America Policy on Homosexuals*, proposed by the Diocese of California; and D010 *Matrimony: On the Sacrament of Marriage*, proposed by the Rev’d Elizabeth Kaeton, Deputy from the Diocese of Newark. By the first week of General Convention, the committee would also receive three resolutions from Committee 15, Education: A046 *Human Sexuality: Conversation with Youth and Young Adults about Sexuality*, proposed by the Executive Council; A050 *HIV/AIDS: HIV/AIDS Prevention Education*, and A080 *Human Affairs: Promote Dialogue on Fidelity in Human Relationships*, proposed by Committee 9, National and International Concerns.

The first meeting of Committee 25 took place on Monday 3 July and opened with a reading from Luke 4, where Jesus proclaims that the Year of Jubilee – the theme of General Convention – has been fulfilled. The members of the committee introduced themselves and reflected individually on the meaning of the passage. Deputy Perry commented that “No one likes a prophet – this committee needs to be prophetic and that is scary.” One deputy noted that this reading was “Good News to the marginalized, the

last, the least, and the lost,” while another found the passage to be a “radical re-interpretation of Isaiah.” Before breaking into an executive session for the purpose of getting to know one another better, Committee 25 noted that they would post public hearings where testimony would be heard and announced that the first would take place on Tuesday the 4th of July.

The public hearings were characterized by personal testimonies from individuals with views from across the spectrum of opinion about human sexuality and morality. During the hearings on resolutions A046, A050, and A080, visitors representing the **Rock the World Youth Mission** asked the committee to amend A046 to include an abstinence clause to the original resolution. Other witnesses, including openly gay deputies from the dioceses of El Camino Real and Newark who are active members of **Integrity**, stressed the importance of fidelity in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships and emphasized the need for the Church to provide education and safe spaces for conversations about human sexuality – especially for gay and lesbian youth. Members of Committee 25 expressed a concern that the meaning of the term ‘Christian tradition’ could be misinterpreted because it excludes lesbian and gay Christians. They were also concerned about the “tradition of not talking about sexuality at all.” Witnesses speaking to resolutions A065, C023, and D010 at the afternoon hearing on 4 July included visitors who described themselves as ‘ex-gay’ individuals who had been saved from the ‘homosexual life-style’ and those who said they were heterosexuals who fully supported friends and family members who are homosexual. A number of gay and lesbian people witnessed to their ‘life-long monogamous relationships’ and two priests

from the **American Anglican Council** spoke against “celebrating relationships that are clearly condemned by Scripture.” One speaker voiced his concern that if the Church began to bless relationships between gay and lesbian couples, then it would also have to bless “poly-amorous’ relationships of three, or four, or more individuals who are in committed relationships.” There was a surprising degree of unanimity among people from all sides of the debate that the ‘local option’ clause of A065 represented an ecclesiology that runs counter to Anglican and Episcopal traditions. Supporters and opponents of same-sex unions had criticized the decision of the SCLM to submit A065 and its resolve that would allow each diocese to determine the resolution of issues related to same-sex relationships – including the blessing of such relationships – and the ordination of homosexual Christians as a Pandora’s Box for local option that no one wanted to see opened.

With each passing day, the number of people attending the hearings of Committee 25 grew and culminated with a gathering of over 700 people on the evening of 7 July. That evening, with few exceptions, the testimony was primarily composed of personal stories. The Rev’d Mariann Budd, from St. John’s in Minneapolis, spoke of the “extraordinary story of resurrection” that was taking place in her parish as a result of blessing same-sex unions following a process of discernment and prayer. A priest from the Diocese of Dallas, David Roseberry, spoke of counseling gay men in San Francisco whom he characterized as “lonely, despairing, unsatisfied men.” He warned the committee that the Church “must never bless what God is ready to heal.” Gert Walter, a visitor from the Diocese of Los Angeles, testified that he had spent “seven years pursuing

men in search of intimacy,” but that he had been healed from living in “unhappy homosexual relations.” Jack Finlaw, a gay man from the Diocese of Colorado, spoke about being able to “live out God’s call in my life because of a wonderful, supportive relationship,” with another man. Through this relationship, he said, “we are able to show the world that God loves us.”¹²⁹ The meeting adjourned following more than two hours of testimony.

The following morning, Committee 25 reconvened before a much smaller gallery to begin the process of assessing the testimony from the previous evening. Bishop Cate Waynick, Diocese of Indiana, noted the difficulty of using the term ‘homosexual’ to describe both those who are gay and lesbian and those who have had ‘homosexual relationships.’

There seems to have been described two different kinds of experience. On the one hand, we heard from people who describe themselves as knowing from an early age that they were different from the people around them and those who felt released and freed when they accepted themselves. The other experience describes people who were caught up in behavior or a way of life that ultimately turned out not to be authentic.

Michael Barlowe, Dean of the Cathedral in the Diocese of Iowa agreed with Waynick and noted the need and concern for pastoral care for everyone involved. The committee then addressed a ‘working paper’ that had been drafted and circulated a few days earlier.

Entitled ‘*Values in Lifelong relationships*’ the working paper had been the subject of excited conversation among the observers who had been attending the Special

¹²⁹ This quote is taken from the article by Tom Beckwith, ‘*Committee 25 hears testimony and mulls action,*’ *Episcopal Life Convention Daily*, 10 July 2000, p. 3.

Committee meetings and hearings. It was immediately noted that the language of the document never referred to homosexuals or heterosexuals:

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, that the members of the 73rd General Convention acknowledge that couples in the Body of Christ and in this Church are living both in marriage and in other committed relationships, and we affirm that the grace of God is mediated through such mutual and loving relationships, and be it further

Resolved that this Church communicates its expectation of any persons who have entered into lifelong union with another that their relationship will be characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest, communication, and the holy love which enables them to see in each other the image of God whether they are experiencing sorrow, disappointment, contentment, or joy; and be it further

Resolved that this Church denounces promiscuity, exploitation, and abusiveness in the relationships of any of its members, and be it further

Resolved that this Church intends to hold all its members accountable to these values, and will provide them the prayerful support, encouragement and pastoral care necessary to live faithfully in them, and be it further

Resolved that, as we have given voice to our affirmation of marriage by providing a rite to celebrate it in our **Book of Common Prayer**, and desiring to affirm all relationships of mutuality and fidelity which mediate the grace of God, the 73rd General Convention directs the SCLM to prepare for consideration by the 74th General Convention, rites for inclusion in the **BOS** by means of which the Church may bless and express support for the persons involved.

The explanation of the working paper noted that while the Episcopal Church values marriage, there are those who for a variety of reasons cannot enter into Christian Marriage, but feel called to a 'shared life.' Reminding the reader of the theme of Jubilee,

the working paper went on to say that it was “high time to call our members to accountability in their relationships, not in a spirit of judgement, but of evaluation.”

There was general agreement among the committee members of the values that the Church should uphold in all relationships, but expressed disagreement over the phrase that the “grace of God is mediated through such mutual and loving relationships.” Bishop John Howe of Central Florida expressed his concern that ‘mediation of grace’ and ‘blessing’ conferred sacramental activity. He stated that he could not ‘bless’ such relationships, but that he could ‘affirm’ them. Committee members Krotz and Snow echoed Waynick's concerns for individuals on both sides of the issue. The session concluded with the committee breaking into two drafting committees to rework the proposal into a more final resolution format.

On Saturday 8 July in what would prove to be the second to last meeting of Special Committee 25, a hearing was held to discuss and consider the remaining resolutions about sexuality that had been directed to the committee. Of particular interest was B045, authored by Geralyn Wolf, Bishop of Rhode Island, and endorsed by committee members Lipscomb and Gulick, and registered earlier in the week. This resolution called for the acknowledgement that the “explosive issues of human sexuality cannot be resolved now” and for the affirmation that “those on both sides of controversial issues have a place in the Church.” It also called for the reaffirmation of the Lambeth imperative to “promote conversation. . . while acknowledging the Church’s normative position on the sanctity of marriage.” The fourth point of the five in this resolution acknowledged “that some, acting in good conscience, who disagree with the traditional

teaching of the Church on human sexuality, will act in contradiction to that position.” As we shall see, this sentence would be incorporated into the substitute to resolution D039, originally authored by Deputy Ralph Spence, Jr. and calling for continued dialogue, which would become the final recommendation of Committee 25.

Resolution B045 was the subject of heated debate. The committee heard testimony that paralleled and repeated just about all of the pro and con presentations from the earlier hearings. A more centrist theme, calling for continuing dialogue, was articulated by a number of deputies and bishops who voiced support of the Wolf resolution. Several members of the General Convention – most notably the Bishop of Virginia, Peter Lee, and other delegates from Virginia and other southern diocese – and a number of visitors hailed B045 as an exemplar of *via media*, the Anglican middle way. The meeting ending with the recommendation that all other resolutions on sexuality be discharged at the committee’s last meeting, scheduled for 10 July.

After a total of five days of meetings and three major hearings, Special Committee 25 endorsed D039 at a meeting in which they finalized seven of the eight resolves through consensus. On Monday 10 July, the committee voted to send this resolution to the House of Deputies:

Resolved, the House of Bishops concurring, that the members of the 73rd General Convention intend for this Church to provide a safe and just structure in which all can utilize their gifts and creative energies for mission, and be it further

Resolved, we acknowledge that while the issues of human sexuality are not yet resolved, there are currently couples in the Body of Christ and in this Church who are living in marriage and couples in the Body of Christ who are living in other life-long committed relationships, and be it further

Resolved, we expect such relationships will be characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God, and be it further

Resolved, we denounce promiscuity, exploitation and abusiveness in the relationships of any of our members, and be it further

Resolved, this Church intends to hold all its members accountable to these values, and will provide for them the prayerful support, encouragement and pastoral care necessary to live faithfully by them, and be it further

Resolved, we acknowledge that some, acting in good conscience, who disagree with the traditional teaching of the Church on human sexuality, will act in contradiction to that position, and be it further

Resolved, that in continuity with previous actions of the General Convention of this Church, and in response to the call for dialogue by the Lambeth Conference, we affirm that those on various sides of controversial issues have a place in the Church, and we affirm the imperative to promote conversation between persons of differing experiences and perspectives, while acknowledging the Church's teaching on the sanctity of marriage, and be it further

Resolved, that desiring to support relationships of mutuality and fidelity other than marriage which mediate the grace of God, the 73rd general Convention directs the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to prepare for consideration by the 74th General Convention rite for inclusion in the **Book of Occasional Services** by means of which the Church may express that support.

The committee was unanimous in its agreement on the first seven resolves, but was unable to achieve consensus on the eighth. Bishops Howe, Lipscomb, and Gulick voted against the final resolve which called for the preparation of rites, citing the lack of a

theological rationale for blessing relationships outside of marriage. Among the deputies, the Rev'd Barnum McCarty cast the only 'no' vote on the last resolve.

Resolution D039 was debated on the floor of the House of Deputies on Tuesday 11 July, where they initially debated on whether or not to vote on the first seven resolves separately from the eighth. Debate paralleled and repeated many of the arguments and concerns heard at the Committee 25 hearings. A number of deputies focussed on the message that passage of the final resolve would destroy the unity of the Church and create schism; some clergy delegates stated that their parishes would lose as many as 2/3 of their membership if the eighth resolve was passed. An equal number of deputies countered this testimony with stories of real growth and the belief that marginalized and disenfranchised people from all walks of life would be attracted to a church where there would truly be 'no outcasts' if resolve eight was passed. Special Committee co-chair Becky Snow asked the deputies to support all eight resolves in order to "support those aspiring to healthy relationships."

The debate continued into the afternoon legislative session that was attended by most members of the House of Bishops, who had suspended their business in order to hear the debate in the House of Deputies. The first seven resolves of resolution D039 passed by a strong voice vote. A roll call vote was requested for consideration of the eighth resolve. With 107 dioceses voting in the lay order, 54 affirmative votes were needed for a majority. Fifty-one delegations voted 'yes,' with thirty-four casting negative votes and nineteen delegations divided. In a vote by orders, a divided vote counts as a 'no.' In the clergy order, 108 dioceses voting, fifty-five votes were needed for the

majority. Even though the clergy cast the requisite number of votes for approval, with 34 'no' votes and 20 divided, passage of the eighth resolve failed because it did not pass in both orders.

The House of Bishops debated the various aspects of Resolution D039 during both legislative sessions on Wednesday 12 July and again on the following morning. During the marathon session on the 12th which was punctuated by sometimes acrimonious, yet civilly-toned debate, the bishops offered impassioned and heated opinions about the resolution, the eighth resolve – which was under reconsideration as the result of a motion by Clark Grew, Bishop of Ohio, and questions about their leadership. The Bishop of Maryland, Bob Ihloff, commended the work of Committee 25 before expressing his distress over “those deputies who said people would leave the Church if the eighth resolve was passed – our leadership is responsible for this attitude.” Jack Croneberger, Bishop of Newark, voiced impassioned support for all eight resolves of D039. Noting that one of the themes of Jubilee is to come home, he asked “What do you do when you can’t go home?” and related a story about his lesbian daughter’s partner who is no longer allowed in her family’s home. “Our home is her home now; she call’s me and my wife ‘Mom and Dad.’” Croneberger then implored the House to “make real what is already true. Provide leadership – don’t sell out to those who threaten to leave!” Bishop Stephen Charleston, President and Dean of the Episcopal Divinity School and former Bishop of Alaska, spoke to threats of defections as a failure of “our leadership – we have failed as teachers of the Gospel. The real issue before this Convention is the moral, ethical, and spiritual leadership of this House.”

William Wantland, retired Bishop of Eau Claire, commended the first seven resolves and rejected the eighth on grounds of unity within both the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion. Bishop Hurlong of Tennessee spoke of the “pain of traditional Episcopalians” over the current debates in the Church and who believe that blessing same-sex unions is wrong and sinful. He warned the House that the “Singapore bishops are wooing Tennessee congregations,” and voiced concern that the current debate was a threat to ecumenical relations and Christian unity. John Howe, Bishop of Central Florida and a member of Committee 25, warned that while there was unanimity around resolves 1 through 7, passing the eighth resolve would be a vote for division. Keith Ackerman, Bishop of Quincy, claimed that the “people who want the eighth resolve want to split the Church!” A number of bishops voiced their concerns that there are neither theological foundations nor guidelines about rites for same-sex unions. Bishop Little of Northern Indiana noted that: “We are the Church of *lex orandi, lex credendi* – this would be an enormous change in doctrine.”

The motion to return the eighth resolve to resolution D039 was defeated by a vote of ‘yes’ 63 and ‘no’ 85, with 4 abstentions and as many as two dozen bishops either not present or not voting. The following morning, Thursday 13 July, the House of Bishops overwhelmingly approved the seven resolves of D039 ‘yes’ 119 and “no’ 19, with 4 abstentions.

After the House of Bishops reconvened to vote the first seven resolves of D039, the next order of business was to revisit a substitute motion made by Vincent Warner, Bishop of Olympia, late the preceding afternoon. His motion called for the bishops to

continue studying the theology of “applicable to long-term committed loving unions” of unmarried persons, regardless of sexual orientation, and to report their findings, including liturgical rites, to the 74th General Convention in 2003. Bishop Warner withdrew his motion and offered in its place a “mind of the House” resolution calling for the creation of a special theology committee to continue the study and conversation on human sexuality. Following brief conversation, it was suggested that the pastoral committee be a part of the conversation with the theology committee. By a strong voice vote, the bishops affirmed the creation of a special committee to be appointed by Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold and brought a close to the discussion of human sexuality at the 73rd General Convention.

As of this writing, post-Convention discourse about human sexuality in general and resolution D039 in particular has been limited. The web pages of conservative, moderate, and liberal factions in the Episcopal Church are silent at this time. **Episcopal Life**, the official newspaper of the Church has not published an edition since the end of General Convention. Reports about the triennial meeting in Denver in other Christian publications, such as **Christianity Today** and **The Christian Century**, have limited their reports to general commentaries on the outcome of the votes on sexuality. **The Living Church** has published two articles¹³⁰ that have focused on the work of Committee 25, one of which was authored by Bishop John Howe.

¹³⁰ See “*Called to Listen Hard*,” **The Living Church**, August 6, 2000, p. 10; also “*Committee 25: An Insider’s View*,” **The Living Church**, September 3, 2000, p. 12.

Regardless of what the media outlets have said or left unsaid, I want to commend Committee 25 for being our Church at its very best. The twelve members represented, to quote Bishop Howe, “the full range of opinion on sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular.” They were essentially strangers to one another who had to learn to work together in a ‘fishbowl’ under the scrutiny of other strangers. Their prayerful consideration of each resolution, their honesty, openness, and willingness to be vulnerable with each other and with the hundreds of people who witnessed their deliberations was a grace-filled experience for many of the people who attended the committee meetings. I want to ‘lift’ them up as a model for our future conversations about sexuality and any other divisive issue that may cross our paths. Behold the face of God.

CONCLUSION

Any movement from contention to transformation will require patient and intentional dialogue that is both God-centered and liturgically centered. The theological endeavor must be inclusive and open to the entire body of Christ and not limited to the decision-making bodies of the Church, the clergy, and/or the theologically educated. It is my hope that this paper will provide a foundation for the development of a dialogical process that will enable the Church to engage the controversial issues of today. I hope that this liturgically-centered dialogical model will provide the Church holy and common ground for transformation..

APPENDIX A

Dialogue

Some guidelines for leaders and participants

In addition to the guidelines offered by Thompsett, Dozier, and Law, I want to highlight the principles of *Welcoming the Stranger* offered by Margaret Guenther in her book, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction*.¹³¹ Guenther discusses ten guidelines that she uses in prepare herself in her capacity as a spiritual director. I want to paraphrase her guidelines. 1) *Welcoming the stranger*: following the rule of St. Benedict, “Let all guest who arrive be received like Christ, for he is going to say, ‘I came as a guest and you received me,’” we must be prepared to welcome everyone into conversation. 2) *Getting ready*: facilitators need to prepare through prayer. 3) *Sharing our space*: Just as the sanctuary is always ready to receive worshippers, so to must our conversation area; this space should be set up and ready when the congregation gathers following the liturgy. 4) *We begin in silence*: invite participants to gather in silent, centering prayer. 5) *A safe place*: confidentiality is essential. 6) *Listening to the story*: We must give one another time and space to tell our stories. 7) *Asking questions*: Ask simple, direct questions when seeking clarity. 8) *Taking out the garbage*: When we find ourselves ‘burdened’ with pain or emotional stress from our conversation, we need time to pray for

¹³¹ Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction*, (Cambridge 1992), pp. 8-39.

release. 9) *Sharing the story*: the stories shared during the course of dialogue need to be remembered and brought into the next round of conversation when necessary. 10) *Self disclosure*: Facilitators, clergy, and parish leaders should be prepared to share their own stories and ideas, but as equals in the process. This chapter will help to prepare facilitators for the post-liturgy dialogues.

As noted above, Thompsett offers seven points for effective dialogue: 1) Seek common ground; 2) Value Conversation; 3) Seek the broadest understanding; 4) Appreciate ambiguity; 5) Make room for imagination; 6) Ask questions; 7) Encourage one another. These guidelines will help to prepare facilitators and participants alike.

Verna Dozier, in *Equipping the Saints: A method of self-directed Bible study for lay groups*¹³² outlines three key steps for effective bible study: 1) Clarify what the passage is saying; 2) Clarify why this passage was preserved; and 3) reflect on what the passage means to you/the Church today.

Eric Law lists eight key ground rules for communication and participation:

1. We are not here to debate who is right or who is wrong. We are here to experience true dialogue in which we strive to communicate honestly and listen actively and openly to each other. We invite you to open your hearts and minds to experience new ideas, feelings, situations, and people, even though at times the process may be uncomfortable.

¹³² Verna Dozier, *Equipping the Saints: A method of self-directed Bible study for lay groups*, (Washington DC 1981), p. 3.

2. Our facilitators are not experts. Their role is to provide a structure and process by which we can better communicate with each other.
3. We recognize that we might have preconceived assumptions and perceptions about others – some are conscious; some are unconscious. We invite you to be aware of how they influence the way you listen and interpret others' words and actions. We also invite you to be aware of how these assumptions affect the way you speak and act in a group. In doing so, we can better maintain our respect for and acceptance of ourselves and others as valuable human beings.
4. We invite you to take responsibility for what you say and what you say on behalf of the group. We also invite you to speak with words that others can hear and understand and whenever possible, use specific personal examples that relate to the topic being discussed.
5. We invite you to expand your listening sense to include not just words, but also feelings being expressed, non-verbal communication such as body language, and different ways of using silence.
6. We invite you to take responsibility for your own feelings as they surface. Feelings may be triggered by particular words or actions, but they may or may not be directly related to the particular interaction. When this happens, simply communicate that feeling without blaming others. In doing so, members of the group can hear and learn constructively the consequences of their words and actions.
7. We invite you to hold the personal information shared here in confidence because only in this way can we feel free to say what is in our minds and hearts.

8. (Add this if translators are used.) If you are translating, try not to protect the speaker or the listener. Simply translate as truthfully as you can what the speaker is trying to say. It is all right to ask for help from others when there is a word or phrase of which you are not sure.¹³³

An Outline for Liturgical Dialogue using the Book of Common Prayer

Suitable for use on consecutive Sundays or for a mutli-day retreat, I will offer two orders of service as potential schedules for a liturgical dialogue. The first is for a four-week dialogue on consecutive Sundays; the second for a two-day, three-night retreat format.

Consecutive Sundays: Sessions One - Four

Morning Prayer or Holy Eucharist

A parish's regular Sunday service is followed. Hymns should be selected to fit the selections from the topical lectionary. Following the service, participants should proceed to the conversation area for a twenty-minute coffee 'hour' before gathering for the first session. Be good stewards of time and keep to the schedule.

¹³³ Law, *TBWBBNC*, p. 86.

On the first Sunday, particular care needs to be given to establishing the format of the conversation and bible study. The ground rules for communication should be posted and each member given a copy, as well as copies of the guidelines from Thompsett and Dozier. The facilitator should read the ground rules at the first session; in the following weeks, a member of the group should be encouraged to read the ground rules at the beginning of each gathering. Opening and closing prayers should be chosen from the *BCP*.

At the beginning of each session, allow one-half hour for people to respond to their first impressions of the lessons just heard. This is a time for people to share their reactions; it is not a time for response or debate between participants.

Break for a one-half hour lunch. Depending on the times of the services, it may be desirable to have the lunch break in lieu of the coffee hour, then begin the introductory portion. Parishes should feel free to adjust this schedule according to their needs.

A one-hour bible study should then commence, following the format suggested by Verna Dozier.

The last half-hour should be used to write down any unanswered questions, thoughts, or ideas that the participants may want to revisit.

Close with prayer.

Subsequent sessions should follow this format. On the Sunday following session three, an hour to an hour and one-half should be set aside for participants to report on the ways in which they may have experienced a change in their understanding or attitudes

toward the topic. If participants have not experienced any changes, they may explain why. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers or ideas. The purpose of this exercise has been to allow a congregation to critically and intentionally engage a body of scripture.

Retreat Format: Sessions One – Four

Session One: Evening Prayer (Friday PM)

Session Two: Morning Prayer (Saturday AM)

Session Three: Noon Prayer or Holy Communion (Saturday Noon)

Session Four: Evening Prayer (Saturday PM)

Session Five: Morning Prayer or Holy Eucharist (Sunday AM)

The weekend retreat format should follow the same process as done in the consecutive Sundays version. There is no conversation session after Evening Prayer on Saturday night – this is free time. The wrap-up occurs after Morning Prayer or Holy Eucharist on Sunday.

This intense format is designed for participants who will come from various parishes around a diocese. They may desire to participate because the topic is of interest; they may come because their parish is not interested in participating in liturgical dialogue. The participants may come from one parish, having chosen this format for reasons of time or interest.

The dialogue section of this proposal is obviously still in process. Fine-tuning details such as the amount of time each segment will require, appropriate breaks, and procedures will only be ironed out after trial and experimentation.

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